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THE MASTER OF CAXTON

THE MASTER OF CAXTON

BY

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AUTHOR OF "WITHOUT A WARRANT"

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1902

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CHAPTER I

NOSTALGIA

THE wild spring winds were shaking the front windows of the great city house. Out in the square the bare branches moved to and fro across my allotment of gray sky. I was wondering whether the green of certain live-oaks far away was at this moment showing against a heaven as blue as I remembered it.

"Will you bind yourself, Miss Reman, to visit the Home for the Homeless once a week, as the committee request?" inquired my secretary.

I turned in my revolving chair. I hated such a chair, but it had come to me along with the desk, and all the papers on the desk and in the pigeon-holes, when my foster-mother had died. To sit in this chair and read all manner of papers concerning soup-kitchens and day-nurseries, and the deserving poor, this had been my daily duty for some time past.

"Once every week?" I asked Miss Pennant with something like dismay. "Forever?"

She suppressed a little laugh.

"They write that they think the matron should have guidance and advice. They are so certain of your profound interest in the institution Mrs. Reman founded——"

"Do they think because I was an orphan-child I can advise how orphans shall be pinafored and taught to love their Redeemer?" I asked, dismally. I reached out my hand for a leather-covered volume that of late I had kept very near me. It was the journal of my foster-mother, dated many years ago.

"You had better not bind yourself, I think," said Miss Pennant, sympathetically. "There is no end to all the things they will demand of you."

"If I do all the rest, I may as well do that," I returned, fingering the manuscript journal. "Sometimes I wonder, Miss Pennant, whether I am bound to any of it."

"I think you are getting very tired, Miss Reman," she suggested. "You ought to take some rest."

"If I stopped for one day, I should never begin again," I said, half to myself. Then I looked across at her rather curiously. "Don't you get tired yourself, Miss Pennant? Reading

and writing reports should be as wearisome to one girl as to another."

"I don't get tired, because I am well paid," she returned, practically. "I wouldn't do it for love, as you do."

"Oh, I am supposed to work for love! Is that it?" I murmured, and I glanced about the room.

All was mine! Costly furniture, fine pictures, stacks upon stacks of books, all mine—in return for services yet to be rendered. I looked down at my dress, half-mourning, soft and fine; this was part of my pay for my long hours at desk and in committee-rooms. And through the windows I saw the gray stone steps of my stately house. Last winter's woodbine leaves scudded across the sidewalk to find shelter from spring's sweeping in nooks and crannies of the walls. It was bleak!

But sunshine and bird-song would surely return to the city square, and lend this bald grandeur a home-like charm. When my hothouse plants were set in neat beds upon my bit of velvet lawn, then should I not perhaps forget my longing for the fragrance the hot sun brews in pine?

"I am paid just as you are, Miss Pennant," I told the other girl, "—with money alone. I am just as free as you are to refuse the work and forego the salary."

"I think you would be perfectly right to take a rest," said she. "It isn't everybody's taste to live as Mrs. Reman did, entirely absorbed in charity work. You shouldn't miss the pleasures of life, at your age."

"What would you advise me to do?" I asked her.

"Leave the whole business of detail to people who like it. Subscribe the money, as much as you think you ought; live with your cousins, the Henry Remans, who are so devoted to you, and go more into society."

"More society!" I exclaimed. "I am worn out with attending charity balls and patronizing bazaars, and giving receptions in honor of celebrated reformers. Society would be no rest to me! Do you know where I originally come from, Miss Pennant? I am Southern born. There is in me an innate love of idleness——"

Here Miss Pennant presumed to laugh at me, and I broke off.

. . . . . .

An entry in Mrs. Reman's journal, written seventeen years before her death, read as follows:

"Rolfe Court House,
"3 June, 18—.

"This remote and uninteresting hamlet consists of a few houses and stores and one very

unsatisfactory tavern, all grouped about the county court-house. My husband cannot possibly benefit by his Southern travels if we continue to put up with the discomforts of such places as this. I am constantly urging our return to New York, where so much important business awaits me. He seems to enjoy our carriage journey, however, though his cough troubles him greatly at night.

"It is true, the country we have passed through lately is very picturesque. It is hilly and densely wooded, and the red clay soil of the roads is very striking and peculiar. For myself, I cannot enjoy the natural beauties of a country whose inhabitants live in such desolation. There is nothing but poverty here since the war. The one fine place I saw near the court-house is closed up and deserted.

"The court-house itself is a mere brick barrack, cheaply constructed after the old one was burned during the war. A few old portraits were saved, and now hang in the upper court-room. My husband and I have carefully looked at them. We are told there are some fine paintings in the closed-up house I mentioned above, but they are not on view, I am thankful to say. I feel it my duty to see everything worth seeing on my travels, but I do not enjoy smoky portraits of persons with whose history I am not acquainted.

"*Evening of same day.*—Our stopping in Rolfe appears providential, after all. I have done so much good this afternoon that I feel consoled for missing, as I must, the first meeting of the Municipal Mission Association in New York.

"On our drive this afternoon, about two miles from the court-house, we passed one of those wretched cabins of the poor-whites that characterize this country. About the door-step I observed a group of four children of striking personal attractions. I descended from the carriage to talk to them. The eldest boy was not in the least shy, and answered all my questions. He told me his name was Bud Dale, that his father was away from home, that they had no mother, and that he took care of the younger children himself. I went into the cabin, to observe its rudeness and squalor, with a pitying heart. It seemed terrible that these really beautiful though frail-looking children should grow up in such miserable privation. Bud said they had plenty to eat, and looked surprised at the question; but I am convinced that their food is very, very coarse and insufficient.

"I decided to adopt all four of them; but my husband, with his usual cold-heartedness, urged me to change my mind. He actually suggested that the children might be allowed to grow up where they were born. If we went on his principle, all charity work would

be pointless. But I feel that I must humor Mr. Reman because of his delicate health, and I decided only to adopt Bud, who is the most beautiful and most intelligent of the four.

"To my chagrin, when the children's father came home, he would not consent to my taking the boy. The poor-whites here are as blind to their own interest as those of the lowest classes in the city. It was in vain that I urged upon Dale that I would be good to Bud. He very stupidly replied that he was a sick man and did not expect to live long, and that when he died he expected Bud to look after the younger children. This was perfectly absurd in view of Bud's own tender age. If the father dies, as I have no doubt he will, the children must all be put into charitable institutions.

"I could do nothing with Dale, and so at last Mr. Reman talked to him. They seemed to understand each other in a way that surprised me, and soon my husband had persuaded the father to let us have the little girl. She is about five years old—though the dull man actually does not know the exact ages of his children. All he could affirm was that she is the third child.

"There was one younger boy who looked bright and attractive, and who enjoyed the distinction of a real name—Archer. The older

children seemed to have only nick-names. Bud means brother, Lilbud (the second) means little brother, and 'Lil' Cassy,' as they call my little girl, means little Cassandra. She is named for her mother, who died years before. These crude designations, in lieu of proper names, convey without further description on how low a plane this class of people live.

"I feel I have done a great work in rescuing a child from such surroundings. I shall watch her development with the greatest interest. She is a grave and melancholy little thing, tall for five years old, very slight and fragile of build, and with speaking dark eyes. My husband thinks she will be very beautiful when she is fed and cared for. I trust she will, as my bringing her to New York will certainly attract a great deal of attention.

"Who knows but she may be the daughter I have so long looked for. As we have no children of our own, I am forced to look among the poor children I am educating for one who will become my successor in my work. If this child proves intelligent and socially presentable, I shall formally adopt her and thus settle the anxious feelings I have about my money. With such scores of nieces and nephews and so many institutions looking for endowments from me, the question of making my will becomes very difficult.

"If I can bring up a daughter to follow in my work, I shall be able to make her my sole heiress."

An entry of six months later date read as follows:

"I have to-day ascertained from the hotel-keeper in Rolfe that the father of my little Cassandra has died. It seems as if I could now secure Bud if I had anyone to send for him; but between Mr. Reman's failing health and my important work, I am too busy to undertake anything more. It will be best to bring up Cassandra in complete separation from her family. She will attach herself more to me, and to the work I mean to fit her for."

This meagre account, written in the characteristically colorless manner of my foster-mother, was the only connecting link between me and my home.

My only link? No, there were memories besides, vague and delicious, like dreams. Where Mrs. Reman had seen only desolation the child, "Lil' Cassy," had drunk in beauty. Bird-songs, the gurgle of a certain spring near our house, the glint of the sunlight on magnolia leaves, the red holly, the breath of the pines —passionately and lovingly I remembered them. Above all I remembered Bud—his way-

ward dark eyes, his fragile and melancholy beauty.

I remembered a certain large and lank black pig that ran like a deer across our sandy yard, and how Bud had chased it and flung himself daringly upon its back and ridden it triumphantly to all our delight.

I remembered standing by the hearth with my little brothers, where our father knelt before the fire and turned the corn-cake in the spider round and round, with one finger planted on its edge. We waited hungrily for it to brown. How fragrantly it smoked; how delicious were the first hot morsels dipped in bacon fat!

I remembered singing a mocking little song to the lizard who ran about our door-step on the logs of the house, daring him to show me his red handkerchief; until he grew angry, as I thought, and thrust forth the flame-colored lappet from his throat.

I knew, at last, that the "red handkerchief" was in no response to my raillery, but only to attract his prey, the flies. I knew that the hoe-cake would no longer taste so delicate; I knew Bud must have grown too large and lazy for such delightful feats of daring as to ride a great black pig. In short, I knew the whole prosy reality of life, thanks to my thorough education.

Still, in the long hours of that stormy spring morning, while Miss Pennant wrote letters for Mrs. Reman's heiress to sign, I let "Lil' Cassy's" childish memories speak to me. They told me that the secret of all my discontent was a profound nostalgia.

How the matron of the Home for the Homeless was to get along without my weekly visit of inspection and advice; who was to take my place at committee meetings, at charity bazaars and balls and entertainments; who was to read the hundreds of begging letters addressed to Mrs. Reman's successor; all this I did not take the trouble to ascertain. I left New York with the haste and secrecy of flight. To Mr. Henry Reman, my foster-mother's executor and one of her many legitimate heirs, I entrusted the settlement of my affairs. To him alone I explained on what grounds I refused the "work" and its "salary;" to the rest of the world I refused all explanations whatsoever. Miss Reman simply went out of existence. I travelled South as Cassandra Dale.

CHAPTER II

REPRESENTATIVES OF ROLFE

FROM New Rome one drives thirty miles to reach Rolfe Court House, and a girl, travelling alone, with considerable luggage, finds a little difficulty in engaging at short notice a suitable conveyance and driver. It chanced the morning I was in the hotel that Miss Fanton, of Rolfe, was there also. I remarked her as I passed her on the veranda for her airy attractions. She was dressed in a summer frock, her ruffled parasol threw a rosy light on her face. She was prettily scolding her escort, as I overheard, because of his delay in getting their party together. He was "scandalously slow," she was "right outdone about it," and if he did not "step 'round and tend to things," they would not get to Rolfe before midnight. "And home," she added, "they hate for me to be late. Cousin Lucy evermore expects the coach will upset some night on our bad roads."

Reluctantly I passed out of hearing, for I was pleased with the singing cadence of the girl's voice. This soft speech of rounded vowels belonged to my native county of Rolfe. I

felt a faint access of regret that I had lost my birthright to talk in that pretty, slurring Southern tongue.

When she approached me in the hotel parlor a few minutes later and introduced herself and her escort, Mr. Peyton-Call, I found her still more attractive. The hotel-keeper had told her I was on my way to Rolfe. With a very pretty cordiality she invited me to join their party, who were driving down in a coach that morning. It would be pleasanter for me, she hoped, than to go in a hired conveyance.

"If you are going to Rolfe you will meet us anyhow," she argued brightly. "We stay down there, and know everybody. 'Tain't worth while to be formal."

"Do you know a family by the name of Dale?" I asked, too eager to hear news of my own people to care how much I might shock these strangers who were taking me for a person of wealth and social distinction. Miss Fanton looked blank; there was no such family in Rolfe, she said.

"Poor-whites," I added, to help her out; her eyes opened wide in amazement.

Here the gentleman spoke up with good control of the surprise he could not quite conceal.

"I know three brothers by the name of Dale, who live not far from the court-house," he said. "There is Bud Dale——"

"And Lilbud, and Archer," I added, and I was ready to cry with joy merely to know that they were alive. For a moment I looked at the floor, battling with strong feeling; then I remembered what was due these courteous strangers and I roused myself to meet their questioning eyes.

"I am Miss Dale," I said. "And these young men I ask about are my brothers whom I haven't seen or heard of since my childhood."

I must say to their credit that these members of Rolfe County gentry bore themselves very gracefully at this trying point. Miss Fanton, rosy-red with embarrassment as she was, bowed sweetly and murmured that she was happy to meet Miss Dale; Mr. Peyton-Call was formally delighted to welcome me to Rolfe. Miss Fanton thought, in vague terms, that it was very lovely in me to come in this way to look up my kin; Mr. Peyton-Call hoped he could serve me in some way.

"You do me the greatest possible service in telling me a little about my brothers," I said to him. He was most glad to answer any questions. He knew them very well; in fact, they were his tenants. He was glad of the opportunity to say that he knew no pleasanter man to deal with than my eldest brother, Bud.

Finding my brothers' landlord so cordially polite, I questioned him a little further. Yes,

they still lived in the old cabin behind live-oaks near a spring, just as I remembered. Mr. Peyton-Call thought I would be gratified in finding very few changes. My brothers were farmers, of course. He believed they did as well as the average. Farming had really ceased to pay in Rolfe, as he knew by experience; he was a farmer himself.

Here Miss Fanton entered a little protest.

"Do pray, Donald, don't put on such airs," she exclaimed to my considerable surprise. "You a farmer!"

Now I first became aware that mischief danced in the eyes of this gentleman from Rolfe. He insisted with dignity, however, that he was a farmer and competent to inform the Northern visitor on the agricultural status of Rolfe. Miss Fanton showed his statement small respect.

"Don't listen at him, Miss Dale," she advised me graciously. "Come home with me to The Terraces and my father will tell you everything in the world you need to know about such things. Papa is really a farmer."

"Colonel Fanton is rather a business man," objected Mr. Peyton-Call.

"Go away from here, Don! I know better. He's a farmer, and he makes it pay; and so will your brothers, Miss Dale, if you get after them a little to make them work."

"Work?" echoed Mr. Peyton-Call, looking serious. "Oh, if you contemplate that I have nothing to say. It's some time since anyone has tried it in Rolfe."

"Don, you're scandalous," scolded the young lady. "I won't have Miss Dale's mind poisoned at the outset against the good old county. You want to make out we're all as triflin' as yourself. Miss Dale,"—she turned to me—"this gentleman's mother was born in Boston, he has been raised in schools in the North and in Europe, he's only been back to Rolfe since he's finished college. Now I, for my part, have never been farther from Rolfe Court House than this. Which of us will you trust for reliable information?"

"Miss Dale, I am of Rolfe," he assured me in his turn, with a well-feigned gravity. "My father's family first settled it, my mother cordially adopted it, my house is there and my land and all my interests. I won't hear it maligned by Miss Fanton. The good old county, I insist, is absolutely free from every taint of industry and progress."

"Don, you know that's all foolishness!" cried Miss Fanton, with a gesture of her hand that waved his words aside. "It's not the way to talk to people from the North. They come down here, and unless we put on a few airs about our progress they don't take any in-

terest in us. That's what papa says. I'm going to take Miss Dale to The Terraces and let papa talk to her."

"I mean to talk to Miss Dale first," said Mr. Peyton-Call.

Without understanding why, I realized that there was something at stake in this playful contention between the two; at least, when Miss Fanton said to me with cordiality and decision, "Miss Dale, I'll introduce you to Rolfe," he added quickly and with a flashing smile: "I'll do more, Miss Dale; I'll represent Rolfe to you."

I saw no reason for avoiding this lively company; the two interested and attracted me. Miss Fanton's friendliness was certainly genuine, her companion at least promised entertainment. When they again urged me to join their party I accepted the invitation. We went out to the coach, where I met the group of gay and pleasant people who were to drive with us. Miss Fanton introduced me as Miss Dale, from New York, and I let it go at that. Presently we were off through the sunny streets of the town, where the four-in-hand attracted great attention. It was a curious way, when I considered it, for me to set out to reach my lowly cabin home.

I sat on the front seat between Mr. Peyton-Call, who drove, and a youthful Mrs. Call, whom

both he and Miss Fanton addressed as "Cousin." Miss Fanton was next behind us and beside her two facile and fluent young men who were, as appeared, going as her guests to The Terraces. She was already making herself highly agreeable to them; or, in plain truth, she flirted with them alternately, showing an impartial vivacity with each. It was hard to see why the two were so good-humored with each other; but when, in the course of the general badinage, I learned that Miss Fanton was formally betrothed to Mr. Peyton-Call, and when I noted that gentleman's indifference to his lady's coquetry, I began to understand that she was not to be taken seriously. Mrs. Call, in fact, seemed to enjoy the situation, and she was the chaperon of the party. I recast some of my own views on what was suitable in general conversation and thenceforth overheard what I could not miss with mere amusement.

Mr. Peyton-Call's only concern seemed to be that I might feel myself left out of this very personal conversation, and he devoted himself to calling my attention to points of interest along the way. He talked well and with a becoming seriousness, so that my first impression of his flippancy was somewhat effaced. Meanwhile we had left town and were traversing a rich farming land with level fields and blooming orchards.

"Is Rolfe County as pretty as this?" I asked. Those behind us overheard my question.

"Rolfe is the only county in the State," cried one.

"Hurrah for its hills and woods!" cried another.

"Hurrah for its sweet spring water!"

"Hurrah for its sweeter girls!"

"Good! Good! Hear! Hear!"

"Three cheers for its horses!"

"Draw the line at horses, please," said Mr. Peyton-Call over his shoulder. "Granted everything else; but there never was a well-bred horse in the county besides those I brought there."

"Oh, go 'way from here, Don!" protested Miss Fanton. "Papa has beautiful horses. Wait till my colts are trained."

"He got them, every one, from me," said Mr. Peyton-Call, nonchalantly.

"Papa seems to have got everything from you," suggested Miss Fanton, sarcastically.

"Well, somebody has," he returned. "It's certain I haven't anything left."

His tone was light and the remark raised a general laugh.

"To answer your question with impartiality, Miss Dale," he continued to me, "no; Rolfe is by no means as pretty as this. I am almost glad we shall not get well into Rolfe till a chari-

table veil of darkness has fallen on its imperfections. To the Northern visitor it will present a wretched aspect."

This was the second time I had been called a Northern visitor and I resented it.

"What interests me," I said, "is not how it will look to a visitor, but how it will look to one returning home to stay." He looked at me an instant with unconcealed surprise.

"That depends on how much of Rolfe remains in you after your Northern education," he said. "To one of us the conditions are anything but wretched. There is probably as fair an acreage of pleasure-ground in Rolfe as there was in the Garden of Eden."

"Then it is all pleasure-ground," I said, laughing.

"Pretty nearly," he responded. "We live merry, careless lives—and the Lord provideth. You will understand that when you see your brothers."

"You insist on this point, Mr. Peyton-Call; and Miss Fanton warns me rather to consider her father," I said, with amusement. "I don't know which to trust."

"Colonel Fanton is not of Rolfe, originally," he returned. "Of course we are proud to claim a man of his remarkable capacity. He came into the county a poor lad and he has amassed a considerable fortune; and since he married

into my father's family I suppose he is identified with Rolfe as closely as an outsider ever can be. We have another man of his stamp near the court-house, a German who has gone into fruit-culture with success, and ignores the Eden round about him; but when I generalize about Rolfe people I mean those born in Rolfe."

"And has Colonel Fanton grown rich by raising fruit?" I asked. There was no particular motive behind my question. In a general way I wanted to know the interests of the region for my brothers' sake.

"No, his speculations have been in lumber," returned Mr. Peyton-Call, with a slight change of his voice.

"Then that is another resource! You led me to think there was only farming."

"The lumber business of the county is done for, absolutely," he assured me with some emphasis. "Even Colonel Fanton will tell you that. He is devoting himself to farming now. It is too bad you have come so late, Miss Dale. You won't find anything to interest yourself in."

I was a little puzzled. I cared nothing about the county at large. I was going home. What he meant, however, was presently made more plain.

"What is still more discouraging to the missionaries that occasionally stray among us

is our absolute self satisfaction," he continued, with a smile.

I saw no way of repudiating the covert accusation here, and I let it go. How could I tell this stranger my reason for particularly detesting the rôle he assigned me? If I told him my whole story he might doubt the truth of it. From a worldly point of view my action in renouncing Mrs. Reman's entire legacy was scarcely sane. No one could judge the act who did not know the motives. One had to understand the loneliness and weariness of the life my foster-mother had meant for me, one had to know my secretly nourished love of my childhood's home to understand me at all. So, while I felt I was in a false position with these people, I took it as part of my old false life. It would appear in due time to all whom it concerned that I was poor, dependent on my family, and come home with single purpose to find a life of peace and affection.

As we had left town before noon I wondered why we were not to cover the thirty miles to Rolfe before nightfall. I had not reckoned on the delay for dinner. At about three o'clock we left the main road to enter a long, shaded lane which led up toward an old square brick house behind a locust-planted lawn.

"We're taking you to the Whittacres, Miss Dale," my hostess, Miss Fanton, explained to

me. "Most of this party aren't going any farther. Fact is, Indian Hill is most too fascinating. It's hard to get away from here, as you'll understand when I tell you it's Mrs. Call's home."

"We'll just try your pretty words, Virgie," returned Mrs. Call, amiably. "Page charged me in her letter to warn you-all you'd be obliged to spend the night with us."

"Indeed, we've no idea in the world of spending the night," said Miss Fanton. "Page is crazy! It's bad enough, I declare, to come down on her for dinner with all this crowd."

"Why, the idea of such a thing!" cried Mrs. Call. "Who ever heard of a crowd too big for Indian Hill? They are just putting on airs before you, Miss Dale. Many's the time they have filled the house so full without a day's warning that they've had to sleep on pallets and been half starved for lack of food."

"Come, Cousin Fanny, don't give Miss Dale an entirely wrong idea about your house," cried Miss Fanton. "They always have so many good things up here, Miss Dale, that when they're not expecting company they evermore waylay folks on the high-road and drag them in to help eat everything up. That's the one reason we are stopping there to-day. It's just to take pity on them."

By this time we had swept up to the front in fine style, horns blowing, everyone hallooing merrily. Out came the Whittacres, some half dozen strong, all with delighted cries of welcome. Mrs. Call was swung down by her husband as soon as the coach stopped and bestormed by her children. Miss Fanton and I were helped down and she forthwith began to introduce me.

"Page, this is Miss Dale, who is going down to Rolfe to be my nearest neighbor; Miss Whittacre, Miss Dale.—Miss Dale, let me present my cousin, Mr. Call.—Mrs. Whittacre, this is a new neighbor of mine. I've brought her here first thing so that she shall get the best possible impression of this country.—Judge Whittacre, here is a young lady from New York who is going down to Rolfe. I'll let you talk with her only if you promise not to poison her mind against our county. You can't think, Miss Dale, what insufferable airs of superiority these people up here sometimes put on."

"We'll simply lay the facts about the two counties before you, Miss Dale, and leave it to your own judgment to decide whether it is best to stay here with us or go on down into those desolate backwoods of Rolfe," said the old gentleman, teasingly.

"Well, Miss Dale must stay here for the

night anyway," said Mrs. Whittacre, pleasantly. "Before to-morrow she will have heard so much about Rolfe she won't need to go there."

"Yes, you-all must stay overnight," cried Miss Whittacre. "Don, oh, Donald! The boys will tend to those horses. You-all come in to dinner at once."

"That is the way they always treat you here," said Miss Fanton as we were led up-stairs to refresh ourselves. "It's pleasant enough when you arrive, but when time comes to go on it's a battle. Most likely they'll form a ring this evening and we'll have to break through to get away at all."

The house was characteristically big and airy, plainly and shabbily furnished in the bedroom where we went, but festively clean and ordered. A colored woman who brought us water was greeted pleasantly by Miss Fanton and questioned about her children, who had been ill. The more I saw of this vivacious young lady the more I was charmed by her manners. She seemed intent only upon enjoying herself and yet forgot no one about her. As we dressed, however, she had a few words with Mrs. Call that threw a less agreeable light on her character.

"I certainly have enjoyed coming down with you-all," said Mrs. Call. "Travelling in a coach

like that makes the trip to New Rome seem right short."

"I'm trying to get all the fun I can out of the coach, for Donald can't afford to keep it and I reckon it will go this summer," returned Miss Fanton. She was standing near her cousin; there was no lowering of her voice as she continued, serenely: "I wonder he didn't gamble the horses away this trip and make us all walk home. Perhaps he did, and then borrowed them for the drive. That would be quite in character."

"Virgie!" protested Mrs. Call; "you are always saying such things about poor Donald."

"It's the truth," declared Miss Fanton, emphatically.

I felt that I might have been excluded from this little family communion; Miss Fanton perhaps divined my feeling.

"It's a shocking thing, but it's no secret, Miss Dale," she said, sweetly. "I'm engaged to the most no-'count man in Rolfe. I mean to reform him when I get time."

"I trust you will get time," said I.

"Oh, yes, it doesn't take long. I've reformed a many," she answered with a careless air.

"Make them quit gambling and drive them to drink; that's Virgie's programme of reform," declared Mrs. Call, whereat the girl laughed with serene amusement.

A few minutes later we were ushered down to dinner. It was the first time I had ever sat at a loaded, crowded Southern table and seen the true joys of entertaining. The medley of food and the crowded service was little to my taste, but the people were delightful. Each one helped another gracefully; there was much animated talk and laughter. A number of barefoot children who came swarming in from out-of-doors to make known their wants at the table without restraint brought confusion to the first part of the meal; but they finished their dinner hurriedly and were off again to play after stipulating that their dessert should be saved for them. The grown people lingered a long while at the table; the dining-room was cool, there was an unfailing supply of iced tea. Presently we were asked to hold up our glasses, the serving-woman removed the cloth, and we sat about the finely polished dark mahogany awhile longer, everyone socially disposed. There was rather more raillery of the young people in regard to their supposed affairs of the heart than seemed to me good form; but, allowing for their different point of view in this one matter, I found them the pleasantest people I had ever chanced among. I suffered not a moment's neglect myself; and I heard amid the family talk much that interested me.

"Your rye looks well, Judge," said one of

our party who looked out of the window across the level fields.

"Since Gordon brought this lady home," said the old gentleman, indicating one of his daughters-in-law, "he's become a great farmer. We shall soon hear of your turning industrious, eh, Donald?" turning to Mr. Peyton-Call. "I hear Caxton isn't doing you much credit."

"The place is all run down," answered the younger man in a tone of cool regret. "There isn't a good road or fence on the estate, and the tenants are ruining the land."

Some laughed a little at his unconcern, others looked grave.

"It's a shame, Donald," said Mrs. Whittacre, her reproof sweetened by great gentleness. "Caxton is the finest place in Rolfe!"

"I often wish, ma'am, I could get time to fix it up a little," he returned in a respectful tone, and the whole company broke into laughter.

"And the house, Donald," protested Mrs. Whittacre, more severely. "Do you keep it in repair?"

"Mrs. Whittacre," he returned with a touch of seriousness, "while I live, the house my mother lived in and cared for and furnished, shall not fall into ruin. I invite you-all to visit me and inspect my premises. Even my shiftlessness has its limits."

"Good for you, Don! You're all right!" cried Mr. George Call. "You take care of Caxton and the land won't run away. And as soon as Colonel Fanton is you're father-in-law he'll start you up out of your lazy ways and make a farmer of you."

"I am waiting for that," he said, looking at his betrothed across the table, "with great impatience."

She tossed her head as the eyes of all were turned upon her.

"I reckon you're not fretting yourself into a fever, Don," she suggested, coolly.

"I'm opposed to long engagements," remarked the gentle Mrs. Whittacre.

"So am I," put in Mr. Peyton-Call, promptly.

"So am I," cried Miss Fanton. "Let's break it off."

"That's a good idea," exclaimed Mr. Keith.

"Excellent!" piped up the other of Miss Fanton's guests.

Mr. Peyton-Call's face remained composed, and whatever there was disagreeable in the words that had passed was once more swept away in general laughter.

"What must you think of us?" said Miss Whittacre to me with a little anxiety. "But everyone down here isn't frivolous, Miss Dale. It's only the people from that dreadful Rolfe. You had better reconsider going there."

Mr. Call had not dropped his subject. He presently began again.

"Colonel Fanton can build your mill up, Donald, and put you in as miller."

"That would be a good idea," assented Mr. Peyton-Call, carelessly.

"I won't have the mill rebuilt," objected Miss Fanton. "Not even to give Donald a respectable occupation. That big rock down there is my picnic-ground!"

"But if I were the miller down there every day would be a picnic," suggested Mr. Peyton-Call.

"Every day that we saw you work would be a circus," she replied.

"There is no use rebuilding the mill, there's no water-power," put in Judge Whittacre. "It's a strange thing, the way that has given out since the war. Peyton Branch never used to run dry in your father's time, Donald."

"I reckon it's just my bad management," he suggested, ironically.

"It's your bad luck, Donald. You're hoodooed," said Miss Fanton.

"Virgie, I consider myself the most fortunate man alive," he replied, with a slight bow toward her.

"You're right you are!" exclaimed Mr. Keith.

"Dead right!" groaned the other young man.

"Oh, hush your foolishness, all of you," Miss Fanton recommended.

"I don't believe there's any luck about it," said Mr. Call, still sticking to his subject. "I was talking just the other day with a gentleman I met in New Rome, who is studying all about the forests of this country. He's a foreigner of some sort and he stays down in Rolfe. You ought to know him, Don. He's got a title as long as your arm. Isn't he staying with those German people east of you?"

"I'm not on very good terms with those German people east of me, and haven't had a chance to meet their guest," returned Mr. Peyton-Call. "I mean to call on him, however. He's an interesting man, they say."

"What's the matter between you and the German, Donald?" inquired Mr. Call.

"Nothing personal. We are opposed in matters of public administration."

"These confounded foreigners want to run everything," remarked Judge Whittacre. "What does he want, Don?"

"Roads, bridges, schools, all sorts of luxuries," returned Mr. Peyton-Call, and as I looked at him with amused interest I caught a half-challenging glance from him. Was the bit of irony for the benefit of the Northern visitor?

"And this professor, or whatever he is, who is staying with the German, he's chuck full of

reform ideas himself," added Mr. Call. "He was telling me about restoring your water-power, Donald——"

"By the way, George, I've found a dog for you." Peyton-Call cut him off in the midst of his sentence, "a thoroughbred Gordon setter. If you'll stop at Caxton the next time you ride down, I'll show him to you. You'd better let me train him with mine."

"Now isn't that triflin' of Donald?" demanded Miss Fanton, "to begin to talk about dogs just when he might have learnt of something to his own advantage."

"I was afraid it might be to your disadvantage, Virgie," he returned. "You don't want your picnic-ground destroyed for any consideration." And he continued to tell Mr. Call about the dog.

"You're evermore unjust to Donald, Virgie," I heard Miss Whittacre protest as we all arose from the table. "You accuse him any time of being trifling—and yet you say you like it."

"I certainly do," she declared. "I can't bear for a man to have anything to do but to wait on me."

We left the hospitable roof of Indian Hill about four o'clock in the afternoon, not without the altercations with our entertainers that Miss Fanton had predicted. Only five remained of the large party of the morning.

"The sun is low; let your horses travel, Don," cried Miss Fanton from behind; "that is, if they are your horses."

"Please don't let that worry you," he begged, in courteous tone.

"Indeed, I couldn't afford to," she returned, maliciously, and her two friends laughed with perfect understanding of the situation.

Whether his own or borrowed horses, Mr. Peyton-Call laid the whip on their sleek backs and we went along at a good pace. The conversation behind us was in full flow immediately. I marvelled that Miss Fanton had not wearied yet; but no, she kept the men up to the mark with a thousand whims and challenges. Now she was in a pet because an opportunity for a compliment had been missed, now in another because one was forced. She lured them on to say daring things and squelched them when they dared. It was coquetry unashamed from first to last. Mr. Peyton-Call was silent awhile; I took for granted that he was giving ear to all his lady said and quailing under it. When, therefore, he resumed some subject of our morning's conversation I was rather surprised by his perfectly cheerful tone. Certainly, this gentleman of Rolfe was no ordinary man, whatever his faults.

I thought it would not be fair to him to put a strain on his good-breeding by asking him

too much about my brothers, and I suppressed a hundred eager questions. For all I knew, this member of the aristocracy, for all his affable ways, might be secretly conscious of a tremendous condescension toward me. I believed I had reached a section where money had not the force to break down social barriers; and as for me, it would shortly appear to all that I had not even money.

So I talked with Mr. Peyton-Call on indifferent subjects and found him an agreeable companion. He seemed to me to be exactly suited to his lively little *fiancée*—quite as careless and frivolous as she, and if not with the same substratum of cordial good-will, still with the habit of great amiability.

The sun was low when we descended into the twilight of a little glen and plashed through a stream that crossed the road; immediately those behind us raised a cheer for Rolfe, and I knew we had crossed the county line.

CHAPTER III

THE LIGHT OF MY HOME

"How far are we from the court-house now?" I asked, looking about me with interest, though, in truth, there was no great difference in the appearance of the darkening country.

"About eight miles," returned Mr. Peyton-Call. "But the driving from here on is so bad that we can't make very good time. The state of the road will be the best index to you of our progress and our thrift."

"What's that sassy thing you are saying, Don?" cried Miss Fanton, for in the lull after the cheering our words had been overheard. "I've told you to mind how you talk to Miss Dale about Rolfe."

"He's only about half a Rolfe County man himself, Miss Dale, and can't appreciate our noble carelessness of appearances," put in her companion, Mr. Bruce.

"He likes the North better than down here, anyhow, and only stays at home about one year out of three," added Mr. Keith, scathingly.

"Go 'way from here, Bob," retorted Mr.

Peyton-Call, disdainfully; which words seemed to express his whole repudiation of the charge. In truth, his accent and expressions were more Southern when he talked with his friends than when he spoke to me.

"Now we all from New Rome stay here as much as we can, and we hope to come here when we die if we are good," declared Mr. Bruce.

"That's the way to talk," said Miss Fanton. "I can't bear for people to put on airs and criticise their own home, especially when they don't do a thing in the world to improve it."

"If that is meant for me it is flaring injustice," retorted Mr. Peyton-Call. "I have long run a free stage-line for the good of the county, and am thus its only connecting link with the outer world of civilization."

This revived the merriment once more, and the three fell back to their absorbing word engagements.

The country really grew more sparsely settled. Long stretches of forest alternated with small clearings until we reached the water-shed of the Tannegee, the only stream of any size we crossed. It was just after sunset when we reached the broad valley suffused with a magic light from the western sky. The northern slope which we descended was gently undulating and dotted with farms whose white and gray build-

ings glowed rose-red in the sunset light. A fair road wound eastward down into the valley-bottoms, and I was hoping our course lay there; but we kept along the turn-pike, which led southward with uncompromising straightness across the flats. The Tannegee—a wild, swift little river, which cuts along the steep and densely wooded southern slope of the valley—we crossed by a wooden bridge. Then came a long, straight hill, so steep that I wondered how people dared drive down or how horses would consent to draw their loads up it at all. On each side were dangerous gullies; dense forests arose at either hand, framing a narrow section of the valley to the view behind and a wedge of the sky in front, where it marked the top of the hill.

"The Tannegee Valley people compare this hill to the straight and narrow way that leadeth unto heaven," observed Mr. Peyton-Call. "The plateau to which we are climbing is the true Rolfe of which we have been telling you. These poor, miserable people who can't live on the heights are in Rolfe but not of Rolfe. How we pity and despise them!"

"And they are making you-all lots of trouble, too, I hear," called Mr. Keith. "Don't they fuss to have the court-house moved nearer the centre of population?"

"Tell them I am the centre of population,"

proposed Miss Fanton. "Besides, it's all foolishness to talk about moving the court-house. You can't move a brick building. It would all tumble to pieces. They ought to have thought about moving it before the war, when it was built of wood."

"Before the war the plateau was more thickly settled than the valley," Mr. Peyton-Call explained to me, after the men's laugh had subsided. "You see the valley lands are suited for truck-farming, and have been occupied recently. Before the war the plateau planters raised cotton and tobacco; but that hasn't paid since we lost our servants, and most of the land is 'thrown out.' We shall presently pass 'Fair Hill,' one of the old deserted places, and there you can get an outlook."

It had grown so dark, however, before we reached the height, that I could see little more than the general configuration of the land. Behind us, the valley of the Tannegee was marked by the lights of its north-slope settlements. To our left the woodland was still unbroken; to our right we looked across the abandoned fields of "Fair Hill," the old plantation already growing up in scrub-pine. The deserted house stood behind its shade-trees, white and hollow and still. Beyond it the fields sank away to the west, a half mile or more, to the edge of a forest.

"Peyton Branch runs over there," said my companion, pointing westward with his whip. "It is the stream that borders your brother's farm, and the little spring that you remember is its tributary."

"That is the mill-stream you were discussing to-day?" I inquired.

"Mill? There is no mill on it," he returned with an air of surprise. "Oh, you mean the ruined mill? That was destroyed long ago. Yes, the road from the court-house to New Rome used to run down along the branch, and of course the grading was far better than it is here. But when they built the new bridge, where we have just crossed, they chose to put it down here where the river is a little narrower. To our enlightened county engineer it seemed to be an economy, and we shall be practically cut off from the world by this steep hill forever and a day. I believe the old fellow foresaw what a fine, exclusive spirit the next generation would develop in Rolfe, and built bridge and road to fit it."

"It may be just the other way; he built without thought, and the spirit developed to fit the road and bridge."

"I trust, Miss Dale, that you are not scientific," he said, suspiciously. "We are pretty hospitable down here, but we have to draw the line somewhere."

"I'm not," I assured him laughing. "But hasn't the serpent already entered? I heard of a scientist, a foreigner, a forester, isn't it, who is already among you?"

"Oh, yes. The 'Professor,' as we say in the provinces. He has kept very quiet, so far. But he is installed in the enemy's camp. We shall be on the lookout for his reforms and nip them in the bud."

"Even if he and his enterprising German host should favor rebuilding the old bridge at the mouth of the branch, and avoiding this grade?"

"Indeed, they would have trouble with me. I believe I own pretty nearly the whole Peyton Branch valley from the court-house to the river."

"I wonder at you! An owner of horses! And you admit that the road is abominable."

"I cordially admit it," he returned, laughing. "But the thing is a question of taxes. I own literally square miles of land in this county and scarcely an acre of it profitable. Every improvement is an added burden of taxation. If the reformers once get the best of me in the county I may as well stare ruin in the face."

He spoke with an air of perfect indifference, as if the prospect he depicted rather amused him; and as I already knew that his future

father-in-law was rich, I felt no particular sympathy for the hard-pressed landholder.

"Rolfe suffered during the war?" I asked. "I have heard that the court-house was burned. And was the old bridge destroyed at that time?"

"No, the bridge went in a freshet that came since the war," he replied, speaking a little more rapidly than seemed natural in him; as if he disliked the subject. "Peyton Branch is a most unreliable stream, Miss Dale. Just now it is a sweet and gurgling brook; earlier in the spring it was a torrent, yellow with mud from the plateau; this summer it will run nearly dry. It has a little of the character of the Rolfe people. We are now amiable, now reckless, and now and then surprisingly dry."

Just then we overtook a team of which the driver led fairly into the ditch to let us pass.

"I believe that's your man from the livery stable, Miss Dale," cried my hostess. "Stop, Donald, I want to speak to him. Is that Mr. Hank's mule-team from New Rome?" she called back to the man.

"Yass'm, dat's who 'tis; I'se got de lady's t'ings!" called back the negro driver.

"And we've got the lady," returned Miss Fanton, pleasantly. "Do you reckon you can find your way to The Terraces?"

"Yass'm, dat I kin," he returned emphati-

cally. "I used to stay down dar. Don' you know me, Miss Virgie? Dis yere's Jake Forbes."

"Why of course I know you, Jake; knew you the minute you spoke," cried Miss Fanton, cordially. Her own accent had softened and broadened like to that of his own race. "How come you left down here? How's Lucy and the little gals?"

"Dey's toleble, thank Gawd! Lucy, she 'lows she's gwine t' come back down yere fust chance she gits. She don't simulate with dem town niggers ve'y much."

"I don't blame her. I don't simulate with them myself," returned Miss Fanton, with perfect gravity of tone. "How you comin' on yourself, Jake?"

"Pohly, thank Gawd! I ain't got over the rheumatics yet. De doctor up yander in New Rome 'lows I'se gittin' better, but I ain't seed it comin'."

"You ought to come to me," said Miss Fanton. "I know a heap better how to doctor you-all colored people than those town doctors, and I don't charge you-all nothing, you know."

"Yass'm, dat's de truth! I reckon I'll have to reply to yo' fo' some medicine, Miss Virgie. How's yo' pa, ma'am?"

"He's well, Jake. What do you hear from Sam?"

"Really, Virgie," protested Mr. Peyton-Call in humble tones, "Jake's family connection is large, and the spring nights are short——"

"If you-all can't wait till I have a few words with an old friend, just drop me right here, and I'll come along with Jake," she retorted, saucily. "All right, Jake," she called to the negro. "Make haste and bring those things on to The Terraces, and make Aunt Glory put you up somewhere for the night."

"But, Miss Fanton, I am not going to The Terraces, and I really want my things," I ventured to protest.

"Mercy me, Miss Dale! You'll surely stay with me to-night!" she exclaimed, with sincere surprise. "The Terraces is the nearest, and it's nearly supper-time. Besides, I have been looking forward to seeing more of you."

I had no idea of presuming upon this hospitality. "You are very kind, but I must go on," I said, firmly. "How much farther is it, Mr. Peyton-Call?"

"Only about two miles," he returned, "and I am entirely at your service, Miss Dale; but I advise you to stay with my cousin; the hotel at the Court House is anything but luxurious——"

"Hotel!" I said with surprise. "I mean to go home."

An awed silence fell on the party at this declaration. I was mortified to learn how thor-

oughly I had misled these people. They took me for a Lady Bountiful who was making a flying visit, with "charity" in view.

"My brothers would be surprised indeed if I didn't come straight to them," I declared with firm faith, "since I have come home to Rolfe to live with them altogether."

"You are quite right, Miss Dale; it would hurt Bud greatly if you went to the hotel," said Mr. Peyton-Call, quickly and cordially. "But he would see nothing strange in your stopping with Miss Fanton for the night. You will really put your brothers out by coming unannounced. They keep bachelors' hall, you know, and, to be plain, they live more roughly than you have any idea of. They couldn't make you comfortable at all."

So it appeared that Mr. Peyton-Call could be straightforward after all.

"I have actually lived that same rough life and remember it perfectly," I answered him. "There in the wagon I have every necessity. I could make myself comfortable in a hollow tree. Indeed, I must go home."

Miss Fanton still protested. If I spent but this one night with her, she would send me over to my brothers in her carriage "soon" the next morning.

"To speak frankly, Miss Fanton, I can't wait," I told her with a little laugh that did

not hide the tremor in my voice. "I have been homesick for seventeen years."

Mr. Peyton-Call turned suddenly toward me; in the fast-gathering darkness I could not read his face and he did not speak. Miss Fanton laid both her hands caressingly on my arm, which was on the back of the seat, as I was turned to speak to her.

"You shall go home," she declared, warmly. "I shall see you home myself."

She called to Jake to follow and bade Mr. Peyton-Call drive on past the entrance to The Terraces.

The party was very quiet after that. Miss Fanton talked in a murmuring tone to the men beside her, Mr. Peyton-Call silently attended to his driving; indeed, the lurching coach was eloquent of dangerous wash-outs in the road. Having no distractions from my thoughts I found them momently more feverishly expectant. At the end I was startled at my companion's quiet announcement.

"There is the light of your home, Miss Dale," he said, and he pointed away to the right where a light glimmered among trees. "And your brothers are in."

"Don't drive to the house. I want to walk up," I said, and he presently drew rein on the high-road where an opening in the low rail

fence and a dimly seen way across the field toward the light bespoke the entrance to my brothers' place.

The party was dumb now, as though my performance were an awe-inspiring ceremony. The colored boy from behind came to the horses' heads, and Mr. Peyton-Call descended and helped me down.

"Give me your hand too, Don, I want to speak to Miss Dale," cried Miss Fanton. She sprang to the ground, took my arm, and led me a step one side.

"Promise to come to me if you're in any difficulty," she said with sweet earnestness; and then to my surprise she kissed me. "I'm coming to see you in the morning," she whispered. I could not speak, but gratefully pressed her hand. I then bade good-night to Mr. Keith and Mr. Bruce, who had descended with their hostess from the coach, and was about to give my hand to Mr. Peyton-Call.

"Oh, I go with you," he said, quickly.

"Yes, Don goes with you," cried Miss Fanton, assisted to her seat again. "We'll wait here to make sure there's no chance of getting you back before we leave you. And we'll send along Jake when he gets here with the things. Good-night!"

As I passed up the indistinct road toward the house behind the trees, I could not conceal

my agitation from Mr. Peyton-Call. He made several remarks to which I found myself unable to reply.

As we neared the cabin I heard men's voices in quiet conversation. My heart beat stormily and I paused to recover myself.

"Does your courage fail you?" asked my companion, softly. I could not answer, but hurried forward again till we were under the great oaks. They stood just as I had remembered them, close before the cabin—or rather the "double-pen" log-house, two cabins under one roof with an open porch between. The light came from the room on the right and thence issued the voices. Again I paused uncertainly.

"They are at supper, I think," said Mr. Peyton-Call, and, indeed, there was a fragrance of roasted meat in the air. "Suppose you look in at them through the window before you decide what you will do."

By this time I was in a panic and glad of any pretext to gain a few minutes in which to calm myself. Quietly I stepped to the window, which was without sash and at which the board shutter stood ajar. I had to raise myself on tiptoe to peer in.

The interior was lit only by the wood fire on the brick hearth. It threw a cheerful glow on the log walls rudely chinked with hand-split boards, where the guns and fishing tackle hung

with an unpremeditated decorative effect. On the hearth some birds were broiling upon a spit, and my three brothers lounged before it, one on a chair, one on a bench, and the third at full length upon the floor. They were long, sinewy fellows, roughly dressed, and in their attitudes most lazy and at ease. The fire-light was on their faces, and eagerly I identified and named each to myself.

The one on the chair was Bud, the eldest of us all, handsome as ever, with his dark and deep-set eyes, and his sweet and melancholy mouth. To the boyish beauty as I remembered it there was added a strength and brilliancy that startled me. He held his head proudly, and his pose in the tipped-back chair was cavalier. Beside him Lilbud, my second brother, did not appear to advantage. His bearing was depressed, and, though he had the same general cast of features as Bud, the dulness of his expression made him insignificant. Archer, the boy on the floor, showed an intelligent face, harder and firmer than that of either of the elders. He, too, was handsome in the lean and nervous style. His face dimly recalled that of my father, though I remembered the latter as dull-eyed and sickly. Archer had a fine high color.

"Those birds must be mighty nigh cooked. Try them, Son," drawled Bud, in a peculiarly

soft tone that struck my ears like a glad surprise. We look to voices, really, as the main index of the disposition; and Bud's voice was as rich and mellow as his coloring.

"Lilbud, you try them," suggested Archer, not moving in his negligent posture on the floor.

Lilbud arose slowly from his bench, and tested the roast with his pocket-knife, Archer watching him.

"They ain't nigh done," pronounced Archer, and Lilbud returned to his seat without having spoken.

"I'm mighty hungry," observed Bud, pleasantly. "Looks like I could eat them raw."

"I love my meat well and done," said Archer, and inevitably conveyed by his tones that he expected to find his preference respected. "I reckon you all can wait a little longer."

"I reckon we can, Son," returned Bud, gently. After a short pause he spoke again. "It seems mighty lonesome without Mose, don't it?"

"It does that," assented Lilbud, softly.

"If ever I catch the nigger that poisoned Mose, I'll kill him, sure," continued Bud in quiet tones. "Things are coming to a pretty pass if a gentleman can't keep a dog just because he steals the blamed nigger's eggs."

"Maybe it wa'n't a nigger that done it," suggested Archer, with a faint smile.

"It just naturally was a nigger," returned Bud, imperturbably.

"I can get a pup of Jim Sweeney," proposed Archer, "or you can ask Mr. Don for a dog, or maybe we can trade Si Dickerson out of Lee; Lee's a good dog, though he's mighty sorry looking."

"Let's have him, Son. Blame his looks," said Bud. "We ain't much on style ourselves. Lilbud, can't you go over after him in the morning?"

"I reckon I can go," said Lilbud; "I reckon it's goin' to rain so I can't plough."

I slipped away from the window and rejoined Mr. Peyton-Call under the trees to bid him a low good-night; he bowed over my hand in silence and left me. The next minute I stood in the room with my brothers.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE

THEY had all three sprung to their feet at my sudden entrance; Bud had his hand on his gun before he fairly saw me. Now he let it slide from his grasp in the paralysis of his amazement. They stared as upon an apparition.

"Brothers," I cried, deeply moved. "I am your sister who was taken North, years ago."

They stirred uneasily; Bud laid down his gun and advanced toward me.

"Be you our sister?" he asked, with serious eyes. "I knowed we had a sister and I knowed she was taken away."

"I am she," I replied, earnestly. "I was a little girl when I left home, but I remember you all and your names. Don't you see I look like Lilbud?"

"She does, for a fact," exclaimed Archer excitedly. "She favors all of us."

"I reckon you're right, Son." Bud gently took my hand. "Well, Sister, if so you be, seeing you have come back to your family and your rightful home, I make you welcome," he said with dignity. Thereupon he took me in

his arms and kissed me right heartily. The caress surprised and unnerved me. I fell to weeping against his shoulder, while he tenderly laid his hand on my hair.

"There, there, Hon', don't cry," he comforted me. "Step up, boys, and bid sister welcome."

Rather shyly my two younger brothers advanced and kissed me in their turn.

"We are mighty glad to see you," said Archer, and Lilbud smiled, though he did not speak.

"But we scarcely expected you to-night," added Bud, apologetically, "and that's how come we acted so surprised. I hate to think we made you cry the first minute you come home."

"I cry because I am so happy to see you again," I assured him, and was able to return their solicitous looks with a smile. They led me to the fire, which Lilbud was ordered to "chunk up," and surveyed me with flattering interest.

"Well, sister, you're a mighty sweet-lookin' girl if you *was* carried off by a Yankee," said Bud, heartily. "What might your name be?"

"Cassandra, like our mother's; but you used to call me Lil' Cassy."

"I recollect now," said Bud, with a delighted smile. "Well, you sure were little-bit when

you were took. I reckon Archer wasn't born then."

"Oh, Bud, you have forgotten. Our mother was dead before Mrs. Reman came and asked for me from our father. Archer was big enough to walk. I must have been five years old and you must have been eight or nine."

"Our ages are mighty uncertain," observed Bud. "Not bein' horses, I don't see no way we can find them out. Pap, he never knew how old we were. You know he is dead, Sister?"

"I had not expected to find him, Brother; I remember he was always sick."

"He was that," assented Bud. "He died before Lilbud had his growth. I raised Son, here, myself." He looked at our youngest brother with evident pride. "Son has got an education," he said, with quiet exultation. "I had him to go to school."

"I am glad to hear that," said I.

"I reckon you have got an education yourself, Sister Cassandra," said Archer, blushing. "I reckon you know more than I do."

"I know a good deal," I returned, smiling. "All the Yankees learn a good deal."

"Blamed if I don't think better of them than I ever did before," cried Bud, genially. "It looks like they have treated you fine. Your dress is gallus, Sister; and you're as rosy as a young girl."

"But I can't be over twenty-two or twenty-three," I exclaimed, very much taken aback.

"Well, that's pretty old to keep your good looks," said Bud, soberly. "But then the Dales are just naturally handsome. I suppose you're married, Sister?"

He seemed surprised and disappointed at my negative answer.

"Twenty-three and not married! That don't seem right now, does it?"

I was rather puzzled to find his point of view.

"You are none of you married," I suggested.

"No, we ain't had no call," he returned, seriously. "But with a lady it's different."

"Well, Bud, she's been raised with the Yankees," put in Archer, by way of excuse for me. "You wouldn't have had her to marry a Yankee."

"Son's that smart he always gets at the bottom of things," cried Bud, admiringly. "No, Sister, I'm mighty glad you waited till you got home."

"I expect you to take care of me," I said, rather plaintively.

"Of course we will," said Bud, with great benevolence. "And we'll find you a husband and take care of him, too, if there's a man in the county that has got style enough for you. I reckon I know what's due to kinfolks. Make

haste, boys, and get Sister Cassandra some supper."

They went at it with great good-will, and as I watched them move about the room the tears came to my eyes once more—tears of relief and gratitude. The feeling of kinship, the loyalty to family had triumphed over any mistrust and dismay that my sudden descent should have aroused in these poor boys. How unreal my anxiety of the past appeared, how unfounded my whole terror of a half hour ago! It was not in my hands to establish this or that relation artificially—I had stepped without one obstacle into my own place.

The preparations for supper were extremely simple. An iron spider beside the hearth, the only cooking utensil in evidence, was not even in use; Lilbud raked an ash-cake from under the coals, and served the birds from the spit upon a tin plate. Archer brought forth a jug of cider and a single mug. The ash-cake, peeled of its manifold wrappings of hickory leaves, the plate with the roast, the jug, and the mug were placed on the bare table, and I was invited to supper. Bud placed the single chair for me, he and Lilbud shared the bench, and our youngest brother sat upon an inverted nail-keg.

"We ain't fixed up for ladies, and that's the truth," said Bud, with unconcealed mortifica-

tion, as he did the honors of the table. "We ain't even got forks on the table. Son, where are the forks?"

There was something suspiciously airy in the way he put the question, and Archer seemed embarrassed for a reply.

"But we can eat these nice little birds better with our fingers, can't we?" said I.

"And we ought to have some glasses," Bud continued, with mild indignation, looking from one to the other of his brothers. "Boys, have you-all smashed everyone of them glasses I bought Christmas? You'll have to make out with the mug, Sister. I know you ain't used to any such poh-white style of eating as this."

He was delightful with his fastidious airs and sincere solicitude. I could scarcely turn my eyes from his handsome, animated face. His magnificent bearing made a feast of the meal, as he towered beside Lilbud, who was more slightly built and bent to the table. Even Archer, who was straight as an Indian, was put in the background by Bud's superior grace. For the rest, all three had excellent table manners; for, besides their quick attendance to my wants, they looked out, each for the others, in a way that was certainly habitual.

It worried them that I was not more hungry, until I explained how late had been my dinner.

"This is my first meal to-day," observed Bud, casually. "There wa'n't nothin' in the house to eat when I went out this mornin', and I never studied about it till noon; and then I got so interested in huntin', I wouldn't take the time to stop and cook me some birds. Boys, now that sister is here, we mustn't run plumb out of meat in that triflin' way. One of us must shoot something every day. Ladies must be fed regular."

"When I know some of you-all are home, I most always bring in something," said Archer, in a tone of defending himself. "But we-all have such a no-'count way of not bein' at home half the time."

"Well, that's got to stop," said Bud, firmly. "We can't leave Sister here alone."

I ventured a question about the farm.

"Lilbud, he's the farmer," said Bud, with an air of introduction; then, encouragingly to his brother, "Lilbud, how's your crop?"

"Hit'll make," returned Lilbud. It was his first utterance in my presence.

"Lemme tell you what's so, Sister, this farm ain't half kept up," said Bud, frankly, "nor we ain't the men to keep it up. Lilbud, he does his best; but things don't seem to look slick and prosperous under his management. Now, I'll tell you what you ought to do. You ought to marry a first-class farmer that'll take hold of

things. This here farm ought to pay. It's good land, or Pap, he wouldn't have rented it. He was a judge of land; and it's been resting now pretty much ever since he farmed it. Your old man ought to do well on it."

"I don't want to marry," I explained, impressed for my own part with the ultimate simplicity of brotherly and sisterly intercourse. "I shall have all I can do to keep house for three big boys like you."

"What do you reckon? We ain't goin' to let you work," cried Bud. "You're a lady and we're gen'lemen; we'll get you a nigger to wait on you."

"I have no money," I said, and looked rather anxiously at their faces. I was touched and relieved by the indifference with which they received the statement.

"It's easy enough to get a-plenty of money, if anyone wants to take the trouble," said Bud, nonchalantly; and when I laughed delightedly, he looked puzzled. "It's the truth," he insisted. "I can get all the horse-training I want to do around the county, and Lilbud can brace up in his farming! You and Archer, Sister, can teach school. We ain't goin' to let ary one of you work."

"I reckon teaching is work, too," said Archer, which proposition Bud appeared to take as a pleasantry.

"I am glad you are fitted to teach," I said to Archer.

"I ought to be fitten," he said, complacently. "I've been to school five years. I learned Bud to write his name."

"He did that," cried Bud, proudly. "He learned me in no time. There's where I wrote it on the wall with a red-hot poker."

He took the lamp from the table and held it so as to light the space above the mantel. I arose to view his autograph. "Robert Dale, Oner," was branded into the log with a broad, uncertain sweep.

"Robert Dale, owner," Bud read it, complacently. "That's my name, and this is my place."

"Your place?" I asked, with grave surprise; but he did not notice it.

"Don't you think anybody that could learn me to write like that ought to make a pretty good school-teacher?" he demanded with a delightful smile, as he put down the lamp.

"Owner is spelled wrong," observed Archer. "I didn't know it myself. I began teaching most too soon," he added with some humor.

"Bud," said I, sticking to my point, "do you really own this farm? I thought it was part of the Peyton-Call estate."

"Well, I reckon it does belong to Caxton, when it comes to that," returned Bud, compos-

edly. "I reckon, by rights, we rent this land from Mr. Don. But he won't bother us. They say he don't know himself where his land begins and where it ends; and it really don't matter, he's got such a heap of it."

"What does he do?" I inquired.

Bud made the expressive gesture of shuffling cards and dealing them out.

"That and courting Miss Virgie," observed Archer.

"If those two get married, they'll own mighty nigh the county," said Bud, meditatively. "Great Day in the Mornin'! I'd like to own all that land."

"You wouldn't do any more with it than you do now," suggested Archer, practically. "You hunt all over it, and you don't have to pay taxes."

"Blame the taxes!" returned Bud. "I reckon Mr. Don don't pay any taxes. I'd like the feeling of owning more land. This farm ain't but forty-eight acres."

"But you don't own it, Bud," I insisted.

"Well, I reckon I don't, by rights," answered Bud, looking rather glum. "I reckon if Mr. Don took the notion to run us off, he'd have the law."

"Perhaps this farm is for sale," I suggested.

"I reckon it is," said Archer, with a laugh.

"Mr. Don's that poor I reckon he'd sell the shingles off of Caxton."

"Then he really can't afford to be careless about collecting rents," said I.

"He can't afford anything he does," said Archer, "gamblin' nor drinkin' nor keepin' horses. He certainly is triflin'."

"He's a gentleman, though," said Bud, sharply, "and educated, too. And he's as nice a man to talk to as there is in the county. Son, don't you start out and give Sister a bad idea of our neighbors."

"I have met Mr. Peyton-Call, Brother, and have a very pleasant impression of him already," I reassured him; and then I told my brothers of the courtesy that had been extended to me that day.

"There's a mighty nice lot of people living around here," was Bud's comment. "Good manners, every one!"

It was noticeable that my brothers felt no condescension in what had been done for me. I knew with deep satisfaction that I was not to have the supreme hardship of adapting myself to vulgar surroundings. What with their warm hearts, care-free life, and their closeness to nature, my brothers were unmistakably gentle.

Even while I thought of this I watched Lilbud clear the table. He set the jug away with

the mug inverted over it, swept the fragments of bread from the table upon the plate that held the remains of the roast, and threw them into the fire together. I wondered a little where or how a woman was needed in this establishment. Though the housekeeping did not recommend itself to me, it had a dispatch and finish of its own. I felt it would be ungracious to criticise.

Bud and Archer had fallen into a grave and secret consultation like one in which women are wont to settle matters of domestic policy. They presently left the room together, and I guessed it was a question as to my accommodation. This reminded me of Jake and my trunks, and I asked Lilbud to light me to the door with the lamp.

Under the oaks stood the mule-team, and Jake on the seat fast asleep. When Lilbud shouted at him he awoke with a start, and drove up to the door.

"Why didn't you let me know you had come," said I. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting here."

I had to repeat myself before he understood, confused, no doubt, by my Northern accent. Then he explained that "Mr. Don" had "chyarged" him not to call out or "make a fuss" until someone came out to look for him.

My brothers quickly unloaded my trunks and

several boxes. Bud was for arranging to entertain the negro and his mules for the night; but Jake was set upon enjoying, belated though he was, the hospitality of The Terraces. Miss Virgie had promised him some medicine, he said. He must see her "soon in de mornin'" before he started home; so I paid him and he went off in a happy frame of mind, singing melodiously through the woods.

"That ain't no town nigger," observed Bud, approvingly. "He has some manners. Now, boys, you all tote these here things into Sister's room."

I followed them into the room across the hall they had so promptly dedicated to me. A newly kindled fire on the hearth lighted it cheerily. Beside the bed on a rude shelf was a pile of books.

"This was Archer's room, but he's proud to give it up to you, Sister," said Bud. "Son, mind your manners."

"Of course I'm glad," said the boy, heartily. "I'll carry these here out of your way."

"Books on law," I exclaimed, taking up one as he piled them together. "Are you studying law, Archer?"

"Yes'm, I read them," he said, between shyness and pride.

"He reads them so much there's no living with him—he reads out loud to himself," cried

Bud, beamingly. "That's how come we put him in here. It's a kind of store-room, too, Sister," he added, apologetically. "You won't mind, for one night, will you? We'll clean it out good for you in the mornin'."

I had them take all the bedding, which I judged they could ill spare, explaining I was fully provided if they would but open my boxes. This was quickly accomplished; and when they had brought me a tin basin full of water they bade me good-night.

"You ain't afraid, Sister?" Bud inquired before he left me. "We'll all of us stay in all night. If it will make you feel any better, I'll sleep out here on the floor, by your door."

I assured him I was not so timid, and after kissing me once more he left me. With a light and joyous heart I made myself comfortable for the night, and fell into a peaceful sleep. Thus in good-will and affection was my new life begun.

CHAPTER V

NEIGHBORS

IT was raining the next morning; but, true to her promise of the night before, Miss Fanton came to call on me. We had finished a leisurely breakfast of fried fish—Archer had been down to the branch to catch them early that morning—and now he was off with his gun to get the dinner. Lilbud had been despatched to a neighbor's to get a certain dog, Lee, which my brothers pronounced necessary to their existence; and Bud and I were standing in the open hallway looking out across a sloping field of rye to the back of the house, silvered with rain. Beyond it a thicket marked the edge of a glen. The air was sweet, fresh, and heavy with nameless scents of the fields. My brother and I stood in silence, drinking it in, thinking of each other, and too content to speak.

There was the splashing sound of a horse's hoofs and a soft call behind us and we turned to see Miss Fanton under our oaks, mounted on a dancing little horse. She was dressed in a dark habit, and her yellow hair, all beaded with raindrops, curled abundantly about her lit-

tle cap of green; a moving, glowing vision under the dark and glossy oaks.

"Good-morning," she called. "Are you at home, Miss Dale?"

I cried her welcome, and Bud and I hastened forward to meet her. She rode up close to the step and reached her hand to me.

"I wanted to make sure you had really become my neighbor," she said to me sweetly, after bowing to Bud, who raised his hat.

"It has really come true," I answered her, smiling.

"You look so different, I most don't know you," she murmured.

"Because I am happy," I explained with warmth.

Her wondering eyes turned to Bud.

"Let me take your horse, Miss Virgie," he said, with easy courtesy.

"This is Mr. Dale?" she asked, with a gracious little inclination of her head.

"This is my eldest brother, Miss Fanton,"—I made the introduction with something between pride and amusement; pride in my brother's grace and beauty, amusement at the incongruity of his meeting Miss Fanton like this.

"Thank you, I will get down for a minute," she said, and she took his hand to alight on the door-step. He led away her horse to the stable and I ushered her into my own room.

"I reckon you think it strange in me to come so early and to come in the rain," she chattered, "but morning is the time I can leave those foolish men behind. They are still in the dining-room with papa, talking politics, and I'm supposed to be busy about housekeeping. I won't stay long enough to interrupt you. You must be right busy this morning."

"I have enough to do, as you can see by my room," I returned; "but I feel that I have endless leisure. It's the first time in years I have not been hurried."

She sat down upon a trunk and looked about at the disarray of my belongings; and what with their luxury and the roughness of the room in which they were unpacked it was a sight to attract one's amused attention. She laughed a little in a friendly way and I joined her. Now she drew off her damp riding-gloves and laid her cool, soft hand on mine in friendly fashion.

"Tell me," she asked with a bright interest, "is it what you expected?"

"I thought my brothers would be farmers—thriftless, perhaps, but living like farmers," I answered her frankly, really glad of a sympathetic ear. "I didn't dream of finding them living like wild men of the woods on just what they can hunt and shoot."

"Don't you think that's more interesting than farming?" she asked.

"Well, it is more picturesque," I admitted; "and if they are savages they are of a courtly and amiable kind. And now my question is, shall I try to civilize them or to make myself over to fit their ways of life?"

"You will find it easier to make them over, I reckon," she said, with another glance at my belongings. "'Taint worth while to be misled by the roughness of things. That's just because they're bachelors. Most likely they'll take kindly to nicer ways of living. It's mighty easy to reform most men."

"I hate the very word reform," I ejaculated.

"Well, that proves you're no Yankee, all by itself," she observed, humorously. "They mostly are devoted to reforming people."

"That's what they've kept me busy at. That's what I've run away from," I confided in her.

"Haven't you given up a heap in coming down here?" she asked, simply.

"I've gained more; I've given up luxuries, but I've gained a home. I was lonely up North."

"Wherever I had heaps of money and heaps of pretty clothes I could make myself perfectly at home," she stated.

"Not if you had to earn your clothes by work you didn't like."

"Well, if they set me to work I'd take off South mighty quick," she admitted. "That's one of the few things I don't take to—work. But, mercy me! I'm talking just like Don Peyton-Call. I reckon I learn it from him. That sort of thing is mighty contagious. But, sure enough, Miss Dale, are you going to stay down here?"

"Sure enough," I repeated, laughing.

"There's only one amusing man in this county, and I'm engaged to him," she warned me. "I'm afraid you'll be bored to death."

"I have three very amusing brothers, Miss Fanton——"

"Brothers!" she made her characteristic gesture of waving something aside. "I haven't the least use in the world for brothers. I want men around me who have no rights I am bound to respect."

She cocked her head so saucily that I was bound to laugh. Her eyes danced, but she continued, gravely:

"But perhaps they taught you up North that it's low-down wicked to talk like this. I've heard if a girl up North speaks to a man three times she has to marry him. Is that true? What are Yankees like, anyway, Miss Dale? They know more than we-all, don't

they? Donald Peyton-Call learned all he knows up North somewhere. They're smarter up yonder than they are down here, I reckon."

"I know plenty of stupid Yankees," I said, guardedly.

"That is just the kind I like," she commented, cheerily. "I can't bear for a man to have any sense. I have a-plenty myself, for all occasions. A man should be simple and trustful and know his place. Donald Peyton-Call knows more than is useful, and in that way he doesn't suit me at all."

Miss Fanton had been heated by the ride, and I now noticed that she shivered slightly by the open window where we sat. I quickly led her out and across to the other room, where there was a fire. Bud was standing there leaning idly against the mantel. He turned to place seats for us, then took his stand to one side, his arm on the mantel, looking down thoughtfully at our visitor.

"You-all certainly know how to be comfortable," she said with pretty animation, addressing herself rather to him than to me. "This is a lovely fire. Our house is as cold this morning as any *thing*. It's the hardest thing to get the servants to let us have a fire in this season. They hang over their own in the kitchen, but in the house they have the hearths all whitened ready for summer weather and

they're right outdone if you ask them to spoil their work."

Bud smiled genially for all reply.

"We all stand around and mind what the servants say, at home," continued Miss Fanton to me. "They are mostly right old and have been with my mother's family since before the war?"

She made the statement with the rising inflection of a question, as if to ask whether I understood—a very common trick of manner with her, and one that lent variety to the flow of her talk. She was a charming picture there, bent forward and spreading her fair little hands to the blaze, her face in a rosy glow of fire-light. Poor Bud had a dazed look in his dark eyes as he looked down at her.

"Do you reckon it'll clear off, Mr. Dale?" she asked him presently. "If it goes on raining, I don't know what I shall do with my visitors. It's mighty hard to entertain them in the house."

Bud went to the window and looked at the sky.

"It's goin' to fair off, I reckon," he said. I saw no signs of it myself, nor indeed were there any; but with Bud it seemed to be a point of etiquette to give a lady a pleasant answer.

Our caller presently asked for her horse and he went to fetch it. I was surprised to see with

what ease he mounted her; and when she was gone I asked where he had learned it. He said he had never done it before, but noticed how it was done at the meets.

"Do you go fox-hunting, Bud?" I asked, with surprise.

"Of course I do, when I have a horse," he returned with equal surprise at my question. "You'll go too, Sister, when it begins in the fall. Miss Virgie always rides."

"Then you have known Miss Fanton before."

"I never spoke to her before," he answered in a low voice, then presently added:

"Sister, it sounds mighty funny to hear you call her Mis' Fanton. Sounds like she was married. Mis' Fanton's been dead a long time."

He ventured on this criticism with great gentleness; but whenever my manner of expressing myself was markedly Northern, Bud would notice it with regret. How he felt about it appeared later in the day, after I had told him all I thought he should know of my life in New York and my relation to Mrs. Reman—for I thought that not even my own brothers should hear about my rejected legacy. Bud's questions were by no means searching, though he was deeply interested in all I related. He could not be made to see however that there was anything for which I had to thank my foster-mother.

"She tried to make you forget your own kin," he said, with gravity. "You wa'n't that kind; but she tried. You say she gave you an education. Well, I would have done the same by you if I'd had the raisin' of you, as I should by rights. I raised Son, and he's a success; and if I ain't had much success with Lilbud it's because I didn't have no good material to start on. Lilbud's like Pap, and Pap never was much account. But you're like Archer and me, and I'd have made a lady out of you without any Yankee interference. Now they might have gone and made a regular Yankee of you, Sister. I haven't a doubt but that's what they aimed to do. You don't talk like us as it is." Then, fearing he had hurt me deeply, he hastened to add: "Not but what anyone would know you were Southern-born, just to look at you. You're mighty nigh the sweetest lookin' girl I ever saw, Sister, and you certainly have got style about you. You haven't got anything any more low and Yankee about you than Miss Virgie. And we'll soon learn you to talk like us, and there's no harm done by your havin' been North, after all."

What was I to say to this? I could only laugh till my tears flowed, and lean against his shoulder to be kissed. He laughed, too, in pure sympathy. Was a girl ever blessed with a more charming brother than my own?

My first day at home had been spent mostly with Bud, who had helped me put my room in order, while the other two were hunting and fishing. My second day at home was spent with Lilbud. The first time he and I were alone together I attempted to draw him out on the subject of his farming; for the fact that we were living rent-free like the wild things of the forest on another's land weighed on me already.

Lilbud seemed to expect to do all the housework alone. He murmured gently against my helping him. When I saw him throw the remains of our breakfast into the fire I asked him, out of my economical soul, whether he had no chickens. He had tried to keep chickens, it seemed, but the hawks got away with them all. It seemed like the boys were never at home at the right time to shoot hawks; and he wasn't much of a shot himself. I was glad to learn of this limitation. It seemed to throw him more into the line of husbandry. I questioned him further as to the stock on the place. It appeared we owned two cows, and a bullock, and a good little steer, and a right-smart number of hogs, but none of these were on the place. They ran loose in the woods. Bud, he had a horse.

"What kind of a horse is it? A good, strong horse?"

"It's a fair to middlin' horse," returned Lilbud, guardedly, and at my request he led me

out to the rickety stable to make the acquaintance of Molly, Bud's little mare. She had a lean and hungry look; but a pretty head and a friendly way of taking a petting.

"Bud, he fools with her a heap," observed Lilbud. "He's a great hand with horses; never has no trouble with them."

Later we walked about the farm, viewing what land was under cultivation. I asked a hundred questions. He answered them patiently to the best of his ability—which was not, it appeared, very great. He seemed to have thought little about his work, but professed to like farming, saying, gently: "I don't love to be idle."

We leaned over a rail-fence and considered a pretty poor stand of corn. Lilbud thought it would "make," but confessed that it needed tending mighty bad. The trouble with tending it enough seemed to lie in the very irregular use he had of the horse.

"Bud, he owns her," Lilbud drawled, "and time I get round to work, he's generally got her. When they were fox-huntin' I ought to have had her to put in my crop; I had to make out with the steer, and that's how come I got behind."

"Wouldn't he have left you the horse if you had asked?"

"I did tell him one day I was in the push of plough-time, and after that he didn't take her

for a while. But she wasn't much good after all that huntin'. It gets a horse to ride her that a way, I don't care how much you favor her. And Bud certainly does favor her. He knows about horses."

And so, with a little further conversation it appeared that Lilbud needed, to insure his year's crop, a mule. He said he could get a good one for forty dollars, and I told him I had so much money left over from my travelling. Lilbud's face lighted up with a gratifying interest. I felt a gush of sympathy for this my least attractive brother.

"What else do you need very much, Lilbud?" I asked. "More help, don't you."

"I ought to be able to make this crop alone," he said, apologetically; "but you see I have to fix the meals and clean up, and I'm so slow it takes me a heap of time."

"I'm going to do all that now," I assured him.

He looked astonished, and not very encouraging.

"I reckon you wouldn't make out very well," he said; "but, of course, if Bud gets you a nigger, that'd give me more time."

"You shall have nothing more to do indoors," I repeated, "but you must make the crop and pay the rent this year, Lilbud."

"If I have a mule I can do it," he said with assurance.

"And I want you to make me a garden, Lilbud," I continued, encouraged to find that a decisive tone from me stimulated him. "I mean to take care of it myself, but you must start it for me."

He looked very doubtful, and objected that he knew nothing in the world about gardens.

"We must dig up a place near the house, and rake it smooth, and divide it into beds," I theorized. "And then we must buy seeds and plant them."

"It's all right about the patch," he returned. "Looks like I could fix that. It seems right late, though, to be plantin' seeds."

"Then we must get young plants and set them out," I decided.

He looked still more perplexed.

"I don't know where we'd get the plants," he said. "Colonel Fanton, he's got about the only garden around here—and I wouldn't want to go to him. There's a Yankee named Bawman over on the east road that has a garden, and I reckon he sells truck; but I don't know him."

"There is no harm in going over there and asking him," I proposed. "I know how to get along with Yankees, you know."

He said it was only about a mile, and we agreed to go in the afternoon when we had prepared the beds.

The day before, Bud and I had lunched on hoe-cake and broiled bacon. He had shown me how to mix and how to bake it in the hot spider, dragging it around with my down-pressed finger so that it should bake evenly on the bottom. When he turned it with an easy toss, and the fragrance of the sweet, fresh, roasting corn-meal reached me I thought it the most enticing bread; when I ate it finally I decided that the food of my race was the most delicious I had ever tasted. My own hoe-cake was so inferior to Bud's that I was wofully disappointed; but Lilbud seemed to appreciate being called to a meal ready served, and I was comforted by his assurance that I would get "the knack of fixin' bread easy as breathin'."

"Supper's about the only meal we-all get anything to eat, anyhow," said Lilbud, in consoling me. "The boys never fail to bring in something."

Lilbud had called it a mile to our neighbor's place. I reckoned it nearer two, and what with my unaccustomed labors of the morning and Lilbud's swift stride, to which I tried to accommodate my steps, I was somewhat fagged before I reached our destination. We accordingly paused to rest on the top of a hill which overlooked the tidy little place of the "Yankee." It was a pleasant sight of fields and flourishing orchards, a decided contrast to all else I had

seen in Rolfe; and the neatly painted little house, the whitewashed fences and out-buildings, the road in good repair which wound down toward them, all impressed Lilbud as they did me.

"Great Day!" he exclaimed, with some approach to animation. "They certainly are slick over here!"

A man was coming up the road from the farm as we took our seats on the log at the top of the hill, and now as he drew near he appeared as a very remarkable figure. He wore an outlandish dress of blue linen, a peasant's smock, unmistakably from the Old World, and he was hatless. In oddest contrast to his lowly garb appeared the wearer, who was anything but a son of the soil, a man of middle age, wearing eye-glasses, and with that forward thrust of the head one sees in students; with features, moreover, of a cast so intellectual and benign that once seen they could hardly be again forgotten.

He, in his turn, searched us with an animated look of surprise as he came up; indeed, Lilbud and I must have looked a strange pair, he in his rough clothes, I in my city-fashioned gown, and withal the strong likeness between us.

Lilbud touched his hat as the stranger passed us; the custom of greeting people on the road was one of the pleasant things in Rolfe to me.

The man responded with a cheery and informal: "Good-evening, good-evening! It is pleasant to be out, is it not?"

"It is indeed," I responded promptly, won to his own tone by the charm and cultivation of his voice. With one more swift and animated look of interest at us both he passed on. We looked after him, and I noted he moved with a jerk and a swing that was almost military. A few hundred steps farther he left the road and struck off into the forest.

"Well," drawled Lilbud, "if that ain't the most outrageous figure of a man I ever see! Them Yankees beat all!"

But the people were not Northerners, as I presently discovered. When we reached the yard-gate two white spitzes flew at us, barking furiously; and a man's voice from the house resounded in German, scolding them with a round "Dass euch der Teufel doch——!"

The master of the house now stepped into the piazza.

"Come in, friends," he called to us, and he spoke with a pronounced accent. "Give those little beasts no attention. Their bark is worse than their bite."

He was a large, square-shouldered man, with a short blonde beard and keen blue eyes, not over thirty years of age, I judged, but with the massive poise of an older man. As we ad-

vanced across the yard, that look of amazement I was learning to expect on every face appeared on his.

"Is this Mr. Bawman?" I asked, feeling sure I was confronted with the German neighbor to the east whom Mr. Peyton-Call had described.

"Baumann is my name, yes. Bawman they call me hereabout," he replied, and surveyed me with frank curiosity. "And you, madam, are Miss Dale from New York, are you not?"

I was rather surprised that the news of my home-coming should have spread already. I introduced my brother Lilbud, whom Mr. Baumann had not noticed yet. He now politely enough bade us enter; his wife, he said, would be glad to meet us. We followed him through a bare, clean little hall into a bare clean room, where a large and severely handsome woman sat at her sewing. She was dressed in calico with exceeding plainness. Her brown hair was in many small and glossy braids and wound about her head with imposing effect.

"Mutter, this is Miss Cassandra Dale, the new neighbor of whom we have heard," the husband introduced me. "She is the sister of the boy who was here about the school a few weeks ago, you remember. And this is another brother of hers."

Mrs. Baumann greeted me with a hearty

hand-shake and looked me over with a half-shy, half-cordial curiosity. She asked me in broken English to be seated, and told me she could understand better than she could speak my language.

"I have come recently to live with my brothers and I find that they have no garden," I went straight at my subject when we were all seated about the little room. I noticed the German and his wife opened their eyes wider at my statement.

"You have into their house gone also, yes?" she inquired, with half-puzzled amusement.

"Yes, and I think we need a garden," I returned.

"Versteht sich!" said Mrs. Baumann.

"To-day we've prepared a plot and now we want plants and seeds," I continued. "And as I am strange here and my brother has not the experience——"

"You are quite right to come to us," broke in Mr. Baumann in friendly fashion. "It's our specialty exactly. Though it's late to begin a garden, the season is favorable. Something may still be done."

"Perhaps you have young plants for sale?" I suggested.

"Nothing for sale," he returned, shortly. "It will be a pleasure to help you all we can."

"I really must not trouble you," I protested.

"You will excuse me if I have made a mistake in coming to you in this way——"

"All right, all right, you have not hurt our pride," he returned with a laugh. "We are plain people who live by what we sell and we have none of the nonsense ideas prevalent here about that; but we can be neighborly, too, in our own way, which is not precisely the way of Rolfe, perhaps. In this case, Miss Dale, be assured it costs us nothing to give you more than you can use; *nicht wahr, Mutter?*" (to his wife). "Go, Gertrud, and bring us what seeds you have." Mrs. Baumann rose and left the room, and her husband continued to me: "It is more than the pleasure of doing a neighborly act; it is something of an inspiration to have a hand in your missionary work of establishing a garden in this region."

"There are not many, then?"

"Practically they do not exist. It is a shame! Here is rich soil and a fine climate; but there is no economy, no industry, no desire to live better," he said, bluntly.

"We make out right well," drawled Lilbud. I was rather pleased with his prompt resentment.

"My brother and I being natives of this county," I said, good-humoredly, "are rather sensitive under this sort of criticism."

"Pardon me if for the moment I did not

identify the elegant young lady before me with these backwoods," he replied, with his short, downright laugh. "But as for being native—I too belong to the soil in Rolfe County. I draw my living from it, I am dependent on my neighbors in public and social ways—in short, I am sufficiently involved in interests here to be allowed the freedom of speech, so-called, this country's boast."

"Oh, pray go on," I returned, a little amusedly. He looked serious now, his blue eyes flashed from one to the other of us as he continued:

"You make great account of the differences among yourselves in your different sections, you Americans," he said, "but North and South and West I have found you the same in this: to all useful criticism you answer in these terms—'We make out right well.' You word it differently everywhere, but everywhere it means the same. The fact is, the Americans do not make out so well any longer. They grow idle, extravagant, careless everywhere. For the pioneer work, for that the spirit of the people was wonderfully fit; but now come other things, economy, discipline, culture, social sacrifice; and in these matters the people need criticism, yes very much indeed."

Mr. Baumann sat upright and squarely in his chair, his strong hands clasping the arms. In

contrast to him, Lilbud was lounging back in an attitude half grace, half sprawl, ragged, languid, scornful. The German represented force and sense, my brother, alas! the opposite. I felt the pathos of it strongly.

"Not long ago," I said in a light tone, "our present critics would have come to us for protection and guidance in these wild forests. But the industrious farmer who scorns the hunter and woodsman is rather ungrateful, I think."

"Not at all, not at all!" he replied, nodding rather in approval of the spirit in which I answered him, and there was again a laugh in his blue eyes. "We show our gratitude by the honesty and courage with which we criticise. We pay the debt we owe the woodsman by guiding him to ways of economy and thrift."

"Well, you haven't very good material for that," I retorted. "As is proved, I suppose, by the fact that we resent your criticism. It's a pity our race didn't die out with the bears and Indians. Once we were heroic frontiersmen. Your civilization makes us poor-whites."

I had grown a little earnest against my will. The man's personality aroused a spirit of resistance. He seemed to be pleased to have aroused it; his tone grew warmer.

"Here is your miserable Rolfe County spirit of fatality!" he exclaimed. "If you were not such a new-comer here, I could make a guess

at the influence you had felt. There is a man here who has capacity for anything; and he smilingly denies free-will, and leans on the wretched circumstances of his environment. I cannot describe to you how angry I get at that man. When strength makes itself deliberately weak, when pride flourishes in shame, then I lose patience altogether."

I guessed of whom Mr. Baumann was speaking, and was amused to note the contrast in the manner of the two men, Mr. Baumann and Mr. Peyton-Call. The gentleman of Rolfe had spoken of his German neighbor with amiable indifference.

Now Mrs. Baumann returned with more little parcels in her hands and on her arms than she could comfortably carry.

"See, Wilhelm, whether this is right?" she asked. He looked them over, I noticed, without relieving her from the discomfort of standing there with both hands helplessly full, rejected most of the packages and slipped a few into his pocket.

"We must not take too many," he said. "We must not plant more seeds than what can be taken care of in an easy, lazy way."

He spoke with a conciliating humor and Lilbud took no notice of his remark. I learned later that our conversation was not altogether easy for him to follow, because of Mr. Bau-

mann's accent and my rapid and strange enunciation.

"Mutter, bring us some baskets; I will myself carry back some young plants, and show our friends what must be done," called Mr. Baumann, and he led us through the back of the house into his trim and thriving garden.

Two yellow-haired children were digging busily in a little bed near the gate, too much absorbed to notice us till I spoke to them.

"What have you planted there?" I asked.

"Flowers," answered the little girl, raising a pretty, flushed face.

"Corn," cried the small boy, merely glancing up and bending to his work again.

"Isn't it silly of Karl?" said the girl. "Papa raises corn in his garden, enough for everyone."

"And flowers grow wild, more than enough," returned Karl, scornfully. "I wouldn't be troubled with flowers."

"What is your name?" I asked the little girl.

"Gertrud, like my mother's; but I am called Trautchen at home."

"And do you speak German?" I questioned further.

"Of course we can," cried Karl, contemptuously. "How do you suppose we would talk to Mutter?"

"Karl, you are impolite," scolded the little sister. "Look up at the lady and answer nicely."

"Haven't time," said Karl, shortly, and I left them.

"Mutter, where is the Herr Doctor?" Mr. Baumann was asking when I rejoined the others.

"Weiss Gott!" she returned, smiling. "The Kinder say he promise each a fairy, if they let him go alone in the woods to-day."

"Dr. Max will find them, if they can be found in these forests," said Mr. Baumann with a laugh, and, turning to me: "You must meet our guest," he said. "He is also a philosopher who has wandered away down here."

When our baskets were filled our friendly neighbor insisted on accompanying us home. On the way he approached Lilbud with some tact on the subject of foxes and their extermination. My brother came out of his rather sullen silence and spoke to the point at some length. It seemed that the services a woodsman could render a farmer were not yet exhausted after all.

Mr. Baumann approved our garden plot and straightway gave us a practical lesson in transplanting. He worked with us till sundown, and I thanked him warmly as he said good-by.

"Come to see us," he said, heartily. "Come once to our afternoon Kaffee-tisch, an institution as foreign here as a Chinese banner. My wife would be pleased to see you, she has no acquaintances here."

"I suppose her not speaking English readily yet——"

"No, it is the other way," he returned, laughing. "She learns no English because she doesn't like her neighbors well enough to talk to them. She is plain and practical, and their light and formal ways are little to her taste."

"Oh, does she find them formal?" I asked with surprise. "I should say they are very simple and genial. It is true, I have only met Miss Fanton——"

"Miss Fanton? I should say that there is little that is congenial between you," he suggested, bluntly.

"On the contrary, I think her charming and I hope to know her better."

"Well, she has a sweet face," he admitted, "and I know only one thing against her. She is betrothed to a very worthless fellow."

I made no response to this and our neighbor departed.

When Bud and Archer came home with their game that night Lilbud and I were able to point with pride to our garden already

planted. Archer's face clouded, however, when he learned who had helped us.

"Mr. Bawmann is neighborly when he feels like it," he said. "He won't let me have the school. He says I don't know enough to teach school."

Bud was highly incensed.

"That's a pretty thing for a man to say that can't talk right himself," he cried. "Who's this Mr. Bawman anyway. He's not from Rolfe. If you want that school, Son, why don't you ask Mr. Don for it?" I reckon he has more to say on the board than this Yankee."

"I've been to Mr. Don," complained Archer, "but he was drunk. When I told him what I wanted, he laughed like he couldn't stop; that's how come I know he was drunk. And I couldn't get a thing out of him."

"Well, you can find him when he's sober," suggested Bud. "He ain't like some. I'll meet him one day when he's riding over to court Miss Virgie, and he'll be all right."

A few minutes later when I was alone with Bud he continued the subject to me.

"I hate for you to get the idea that our neighbors ain't nice people, Sister," he said. "Archer's outdone about the school, and so am I. But Mr. Bawmann and Mr. Don ain't as bad as we make them out. Mr. Bawmann

is a Yankee, and he ain't got any manners, that's a fact, and Mr. Don does get drunk, I reckon; but they're just as nice men as you want to meet, both of them."

"Bud, no one can be nice who drinks too much," I said, with decision. "I hope you boys never do that."

"No, *ma'am*, we don't," returned Bud, with emphasis. "I never get drunk except Christmas week and court week, and Lilbud he never did care for liquor. Son, he *is* a little given to it. He's like Pap. You know, Sister, Pap was right poorly for a good many years, and he had to take it. But he always knew when he'd had enough and he taught me the same, and I've raised the boys according. 'Tain't worth while for you to worry about it, Sister."

"If I ever saw one of my brothers in that condition, I think it would break my heart," I exclaimed. "I want to respect you boys as I love you."

"Well, Sister, you shall," said Bud, warmly. "I'll take care and keep out of your way myself, and I'll tell Son to mind and do the same."

I felt I had not yet made the impression I desired, and I read the dear fellow a still more grave and earnest temperance sermon. He listened attentively, as he always did to me; but I seemed to fail to impress him, until I sug-

gested that the drinking habit would injure Archer's finer powers of intellect. This was touching Bud in his most tender point.

"You're right, Sister Cassy, it certainly does muddle a man's mind and makes him lose his smartness," he assented, gravely. "I know I hav'n't been tendin' to Archer right, to let him start in drinkin'. But I'll learn him better right now. I'll lick him good, so help me God, the next time I catch him at it with the fellows at the court-house."

"Bud, that boy will do everything he sees his big brother do, who raised him and taught him how to behave," I said, with solemnity. "You can't lick him enough to break him of following your example."

"It's the truth," Bud admitted, soberly.

I watched him as he sat and meditated on my words, swayed between tears and laughter at the dear fellow's way of taking the whole subject. His face, first clouded by unpleasant thoughts, cleared, finally, into an expression of settled resolve.

"Sister Cassandra, if you'll write me out a real cast-iron pledge I'll sign it," he said. "And the boy won't have learned me to write for nothin'."

"Can't you work out a way to do right without paper or ink or even promises to me," I said. "I don't like a pledge, Bud. It's like

tying up an angry man, instead of reasoning him into controlling himself."

"The reasoning might be pleasanter, but the tying-up would be a heap safer," returned Bud, cautiously.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISTRESS OF THE TERRACES

MISS FANTON showed no disposition to drop my acquaintance after her first courtesies. She came to see me again within a week after her first visit, this time on foot and accompanied by a stout, neatly dressed old colored woman who carried a basket. I was working in my garden with a hoe, when Miss Fanton came around the corner of the house, daintily lifting her frilled white dress from the ground. When she saw me she stopped and burst into rippling laughter.

"You are the prettiest, funniest sight in the world," she cried. "What on earth makes you do that?"

I explained my enterprise, and pointed out to her my little plants in rows.

"For goodness sakes, child, don't do it yourself," she advised. "It'll kill you. Where is that big brother of yours? If he were mine, I'd never let him out of my sight. He'd be steppin' around waitin' on me all day."

"He does, very nearly," I declared, "and this is play for me, Miss Fanton. But I'm glad to stop. It's tiring."

"I should think so, indeed;" and then she introduced her companion. "Miss Cassandra, this is Aunt Juliet, the best mammy in the world, who knows more than anyone in the county. If ever you are in any difficulty about house-keeping or anything else, she can help you out."

"Yes'm! Dat I kin!" said the old woman. "Howdo, Miss Cassandra, ma'am. How yo' feelin' to-day, ma'am?"

Her eyes were shrewd, and she looked over her young mistress's new acquaintance with unconcealed intentness. I greeted her cordially, and Miss Fanton continued:

"Aunt Juliet has brought over some garden pease. They are sent with compliments from my papa. He will do himself the honor of calling on you soon." I expressed my appreciation, and she suggested that Aunt Juliet should shell them for me while we talked.

"Indeed, I cannot let my visitors work for me," I protested, smiling.

"Law, chile, tain't no work to hull them pease," said the old woman, graciously. "I'd love to do it for you." They both insisted on the arrangement, so I fetched a dish and Mammy Juliet sat down in the shade, while Miss Fanton and I went into the house, where she wanted to see how much I had "fixed up" since her last call.

"You certainly did please Mammy by calling her your visitor," whispered Miss Virgie. "I wanted so much for her to like you. She's awfully cranky, but when she once likes you she's as loyal as an Indian. And when she doesn't like you—well, she can't bear Donald Peyton-Call, and I've no idea she'll let me marry him. By the way, have you seen him about? No? I've lost him. He hasn't been near me since the night we brought you home. Mammy always says he's terribly fickle, so I thought perhaps you were to blame. I like fickle men—it's easy to get rid of them when you're tired of them. What's the matter, honey? Don't you like the way I talk?"

"No, I don't," I returned frankly, "though I know you don't mean it——"

"My dear, I mean every word I say," she assured me, emphatically. "I know all about Donald. We're ever so much alike, he and I; we're cousins, you know. Great-grandfather Call was Scotch, and very steady; but he married twice, frivolous wives both times, and I'm descended from one, and Donald from the other. Donald is worse than I, because the Peyton-Calls, the second wife's children, were rich, and had three generations of fun; I'm descended from the plain Calls, as they were called, who had to work a little and behave themselves. So I have a little character, but

Donald hasn't any. Papa will tell you another story, but I know better. Papa is perfectly devoted to Donald, and won't admit that he has a fault."

My face must have expressed some of my amazement, for Miss Fanton continued by way of explanation.

"Oh, I don't mean that Donald's airs and graces have captivated papa; but he always has been devoted to Donald ever since the war when he and Aunt Lucia—that's Don's mother—were left alone at Caxton. She was a lovely young widow then, with her forlorn little boy, and they were related to mamma, and naturally papa took an interest in them. He really did more for them than mamma wanted him to. Mamma and Aunt Lucia hated each other; I know they would have hated the idea of their children ever marrying. Sometimes I think it would be bad luck for me to marry Donald for that very reason; but I reckon papa will coax me around to it in time. I'm mighty good-natured, myself."

She flung this off so airily that it was hard to take the serious side of the aspect; and though I felt uneasy, I laughed when she did.

"It's a proof you are Southern-born, you can positively play at being poor," she exclaimed, as I took her about the house. "Why, I like all this a heap better than The Terraces. Our

house is big and stately enough, but inside it's tacky. Those flowers look sweet in that stone churn. Why haven't I ever thought of that? But I don't get heart to fix up things at home. Cousin Lucy and Mammy Juliet and papa run everything; all they want of me is to entertain the company. I'd like a heap better to live in a little house like this with a lot of handsome, dark-eyed brothers. But, mercy me! Caxton is bigger than The Terraces, and Donald hasn't any brothers and sisters, and his eyes are just the color of a cat's, like his mother's. He looks exactly like her, anyway. He isn't a Peyton-Call; they were heavy, ugly, downright, plain-spoken men; but this Yankee mother of Donald's was just a beautiful cat."

"Where did she come from?" I asked.

"She was a Boston belle, whose people were red-hot Abolitionists, and she pretended she wanted to reform her Southern husband and make him set free his slaves. When she found out how convenient they were she changed her mind. They say Aunt Lucia was the worst rebel in the State when the war broke out; and then her people disinherited her. They educated Donald, but now they won't have anything to do with him because he plays cards. They are regular prigs, I reckon, the kind that grow up North."

"I grew up North," I reminded her, laughingly.

"Well, honey, you belong to Rolfe, that's plain," she returned, cordially. "I never saw a real Yankee girl as sweet and as well-dressed as you are. Aunt Lucia was beautiful and wore wonderful clothes, but she was mean. She spent money on clothes, that ought to have been saved for Donald. She had to have her ball-gowns and she had to give suppers, no matter how poor they were; and, of course, that used up the money. She killed herself dancing, and that was lucky for Donald. Now he worships her memory like that of a saint; but if he'd been a little older he would have seen where he got some of his own faults. That's about all he did inherit—a frivolous and extravagant disposition!"

"How do you mean she killed herself dancing?" I asked, fascinated, in spite of myself, by the girl's sensational hints.

"She was giving a ball," Virgie explained, delighted at my interest. "She had a lovely new gown for it—I'll show it to you, I have it in my wardrobe at home—and she would dance though she was ill. She danced until she fainted and she never became conscious again, but died right there in that same gown. They said then that she had heart trouble, but Mammy says"—Virgie lowered her voice—

"that she hadn't any heart at all, but that the devil came and got her because she never took care of her little boy."

"Dreadful!" I exclaimed.

"I'll show you the dress," said Virgie, nodding solemnly. "It's beautiful."

"I don't want to see it."

"It's lovely, I declare it is. Sometimes I put it on in my own room. It's the most becoming thing! I often wish I could wear it, just once; but I wouldn't dare let Don see me in it."

"I know you wouldn't really want to wear it!"

"Oh, yes, I'm no better than Aunt Lucia myself," she returned flippantly. "I would dance myself to death if I had the chance. But we don't dance in Rolfe any more. When Don was courting me he used to get up germans to please me, but now he doesn't have to take any trouble. I'm going to tell him you want to dance. Perhaps he will stir up things for you."

"But I don't want to dance," I protested, energetically. She laughed incredulously and kissed me good-by.

"Come to The Terraces as soon as you can," she urged. "Don't make me do all the visiting. Mammy! oh Mammy! I'm ready now." And together they took their departure.

In the course of a few days I returned my new friend's call, and on the occasion I met her father. I was a little disappointed in the man who was represented to be the most enterprising spirit of Rolfe. Colonel Fanton was decidedly dull. He was benevolent enough, however, and gave me a great deal of kindly advice relative to the management of my brothers and their farming. Finally he wound up with a rather absurd congratulation on my having such an excellent landlord. His young friend, Peyton-Call, he understood, was very liberal with his tenants.

"So it appears," I returned, amused. "He seems to collect no rent at all."

"And his land is very rich," continued Colonel Fanton, talking on over my head. "In fact, he has been more provident than other farmers about here. He always allows his land plenty of rest after cultivation, so that it can recover fully for the next crop. Many plantations on the plateau have been worn out by injudicious use, but Caxton has been kept in excellent condition."

"You surprise me," I said, with candor.

"It is a popular fallacy hereabout," he continued with a touch of severity, "that my young neighbor is a poor manager; but I, who am familiar with his policy, can only approve of it. Of course, in throwing out so much land he

has not wanted to incur the useless expense of fences, and so the place may look a little neglected."

"I have seen very little of the place," I returned, "but I have met Mr. Peyton-Call, and the tone in which he spoke of farming in general, and of Caxton in particular, gave me an impression of—carelessness."

Virgie giggled outright. Her father slid from one corner of his horse-hair sofa into another, and eyed me with strong disapproval.

"Nothing in the world but an affectation of nonchalance," he exclaimed. "I happen to know with what care he looks after every acre of his estate, waiting for the timber to grow in one place, planning division and sale in another, giving a promising but backward tenant more time here and there, and preserving the game and natural beauties whenever this does not conflict with agricultural interests."

"Yes," put in Virgie. "Don looks out for pretty picnic grounds for me. He won't hear of having the mill rebuilt."

"What's that?" asked her father. His tone struck me as being both sharp and nervous—not in character, I thought.

"At the Whittacres, papa, they were discussing the Peyton Branch water-power," Virgie began to explain——

"What foolishness!" interrupted Colonel Fanton with a wave of his hand, as if to sweep the idea off the face of the earth. "There isn't any water-power in Rolfe. Don't give Miss Dale such ideas as that, daughter."

"Why, she doesn't care," said Virgie, with surprise. "Girls don't care about such things."

"The interests of this county, Miss Dale, are strictly agricultural," said Colonel Fanton to me with the air of passing over Virgie's childish chatter with indulgence.

"Yes?" I said, with the desire to seem politely interested. "Isn't there some value in the timber here?"

"None," said Colonel Fanton, with decision, and for some reason or other the man was displeased. He presently excused himself, and left Virgie to entertain me.

And now she led me about the house and grounds, chattering gayly all the while, herself the comment on all that I saw about The Terraces. The house stood on the bluffs of the Tannegee; and the river-side was called the front, following the traditions of the lower reaches, where the wharfs of each plantation and the lawns sloping down to tide-water justify the designation. This river front had the regulation huge white pillars to form the whole façade, and a porch with high wooden steps leading down to the thickly planted shrubbery of the

garden. Thence the terraces, that named the place, fell steeply to the river. The bluffs were high, and the channel was narrow; and just below were brawling rapids whose sound was forever in the air. On that height, too, the wind seemed forever stirring; so that between the surging foliage and the chiding river there was never a lull.

The actual front of the house, the real approach, was on the opposite side, where a smaller and more graceful porch in Colonial style relieved the severity of the square, brick house. From the house-door the view was over broad fields of Colonel Fanton's plantation.

"We are ungrateful to turn away from the river that brought us all the bread and jam we have upon its waters," chattered Virgie, as she showed me about. "Our living rooms are all to the county-front, you see. Only my bedroom, upstairs, is to the river. How did the river bring us jam? By carrying logs for us. Does it look to you like that water isn't good for much but to get drowned in? It's been a faithful old mule to the Fantons. Rather a 'desprit sperrit,' as Jake used to call his mule, it looks, doesn't it; but four miles farther down the rapids end. Papa used to have a saw-mill down there. It isn't running any more. It's all been cut and rafted. He told you there was no more timber, didn't he? I reckon you think

all the mills in this country are ruined, don't you? If they want to start any I wish they'd start the saw-mill again. I used to like the steady pillar of smoke that I saw down yonder all through my childhood. They burnt the slabs night and day, you know. I used to love to ride down there and listen to the logs squealing for fright when the saw had them; and then to see the timbers shoot down the slide and plunge into the water; and to see the long, narrow rafts made up. Then they would cut loose and swing out into the river and slide away down around the bend, the bow-hands at the sweep straining and whooping together to keep it in the channel. Oh, it was fine!"

We were in the piazza again and she was leaning against one of the big white pillars, her head bent as if she were listening to the river below us.

"I used to long to go down with the river," she continued idly—"'way down into tide-water. I thought that was the world. Then I turned round like the house, and looked at Rolfe, and found that was world enough for me." She laughed aloud. "'Tis a good place for dancing, and hunting, and love-making, and what better can you want. You will like Rolfe yourself, sweet Cassy, when we have taught you to be frivolous."

"I like it now," I returned, looking with

dreamy pleasure at the picture she made standing there.

"No, you don't like it yet. You nurse a secret disapproval of our ways," she returned, playfully. "Come, I must harden you. You shall see the gown of my beautiful and triflin' cousin, Lucia. Come, no protest! I have it in my room, and not half enough excuses to get it out and handle it."

She accordingly led me upstairs, and brought from the bottom of her wardrobe the box containing the fatal gown in which Mrs. Peyton-Call had died. She displayed it with the keenest pleasure. In truth, it was of great elegance, and I somewhat forgot the unhallowed association, and examined it with interest.

"Look," said Virgie, in a mysterious tone, daintily parting the laces on the low-cut bodice, "I believe I am the only person who ever saw this."

She disclosed a bit of folded paper, securely pinned to the silk.

"I was so excited when I first found it," she continued, laughing, "I thought it would be a love-letter of the beautiful young widow; but it turned out to be only an old receipt for a lot of money papa gave her. Wait, I will show you. It's interesting anyhow, because no one knew she received money from papa. Mamma used to wonder where she got the money to throw

away in those days, when everyone was so poor."

She had unfastened the paper, and unfolded it for me.

"You see it is written in papa's hand, and she had signed 'Lucia Beacon Peyton-Call.' At least papa was business-like with her. Mamma used to say you had to put sand on your hands to hold her. I suppose she had received the money and was to give this receipt for it to papa at the ball, and then, when she died, she forgot all about it."

I examined the paper curiously. There was no hint in the wording of the receipt as to what Colonel Fanton had received from Mrs. Peyton-Call for which he had paid her this sum of money; it was simply a formal acknowledgment that she had had, on such and such a date, this large amount of cash; and all the circumstances went to indicate that the transaction between the two had been secret.

Without a word, I returned the paper to Virgie. She pinned it back in its place, chattering cheerfully the while.

"I suppose that receipt belongs to papa, but I shall not give it to him. I want to keep this dress exactly as it is. It really belongs to Donald; but they gave a lot of Cousin Lucia's lovely things to mamma. She never wore one of them. She despised Cousin Lucia even after she was dead. I can't understand hating dead

people, can you? I'm always so sorry for them. They'll never have any more fun. Do you want to be an angel, Cassy? I don't. Sometimes I think I'll be just the one to die young, I love so much to live."

"Put the gown away," I begged her. "It suggests death and evil."

"But if I have to die, I should like to die in this," she said, reluctantly holding back the lid and gazing at the rich and silvery folds of the garment. "It is so becoming to me. I have never had an elegant dress. You have such beautiful gowns, I suppose this doesn't excite you."

"Virgie," I begged uneasily, "promise me never in your life to put on this gown again."

"I can't promise that," she cried out. "If I ever get a chance, I'll be obliged to wear it. It bewitched me long ago."

I resolutely took the lid of the box from her hand, and covered the silk from her view.

"Come home with me," I said. "I have the loveliest little gown of crêpe, blue as the sky, made in Paris. Bud saw me unfold it the other day, and exclaimed, 'That would suit Miss Virgie.' I think it would, too, and I want to give it to you. Come home and try it on, and forget this box and all that's in it."

"I will," she cried, delightedly. "I'll trust your taste, sweet Cassy, and that of your handsome big brother."

CHAPTER VII

REFORESTRATION

BUD, it appeared, was handy with tools. He undertook to build a lean-to or extra room behind each of the two cabins that formed our house. He had the lumber for it already lying in the little barn.

"Lilbud, he took a notion to get married last fall, and I got this stuff then," he explained, carelessly. "I reckoned we'd need more room."

"Whom was he going to marry?" I asked, with some anxiety.

"I don't rightly know whether he had anybody picked out," Bud returned. "I reckon he just naturally wanted to get married; but looks like no one would have him. Lilbud, he ain't so smart as the rest of us, nor he ain't so good-lookin'. I reckon he'll have a time gettin' him a wife."

Bud's perfect gravity and good faith threw me into rather inappropriate laughter. He did not understand my amusement, but he smiled sympathetically and continued with some relish to discuss his brother's inferiority.

"Lilbud's like Pap. He's right slow. He don't have any luck at cards, and he can't shoot. Pap, he never could shoot; we liked to starve here one time, till I learned myself to shoot with Pap's old gun, and I learned Son as soon as he was big enough to stagger under it. But Lilbud wasn't much account, so I had just naturally to make a farmer out of him. He's right smart of a farmer when he has any luck. But nobody would marry him. He lacks style."

The lean-to was now being built for me, and Bud's hammer and saw resounded cheerfully. Indeed, there was an air of rejuvenation about the whole place. The door-yard was raked, the steps were scrubbed, we were planting, pruning, and watering with more good-will than science. I was taking Miss Fanton's advice that I should let my brothers wait on me, and the dear fellows seemed to enjoy it hugely.

About a week after our garden was planted Mr. Baumann drove up in the afternoon to inquire about it. He seemed impressed with the changes on our premises.

"The progress of civilization is more rapid than usual," he observed. Bud came forward when he heard who was at the front door, and thanked our visitor with grace and dignity for the help he had given me and Lilbud with the garden.

"I've aimed to call on you ever since, Mr.

Baumann," he said; "but it looks like we ought to spend all our time right now fixin' up to make Sister a little more comfortable."

"It seems to me she is fixing up to make *you* more comfortable," said Mr. Baumann, in rather ungracious response. I was offended.

"My brothers are doing everything," I assured Mr. Baumann.

"Then have you time to go home with me to take coffee this afternoon with Mrs. Baumann?" he asked. "She sends you a special invitation for to-day, because she has succeeded particularly well with her cake this morning."

Bud genially encouraged me to go, promising to come after me himself, and I made ready for the festivity of taking afternoon coffee with my German neighbors.

On the way I approached Mr. Baumann on the subject of the district school, and asked him whether I could be appointed as the teacher, with Archer for my assistant. He received the proposition with a surprise I did not understand. Finding me serious, he seemed to consider my application with high favor.

"You would really be doing a useful work," he said.

"Dear me, I hadn't thought of that!" I ejaculated.

"You think chiefly of the benefit it will be to your brother, of course," said he. "I'm

sure you're right. It will be a useful experience for him to teach under you, but rather hard work for you, I should say."

"I haven't examined Archer at all as yet."

"I have," he said, with a short laugh. "He is a typical product of the school as it has been. His whole learning is a senseless rigmarole. You'll have to begin at the beginning and break down his astonishing vanity; but I don't see any better way than the one you propose. There's only money for one teacher, of course, but that's not the point with what you have in view. I'll be very glad to give you the work jointly."

"It is all in your hands, then?"

"Nominally it is not; but I've been making such a fight since we got rid of the incompetent man we've had for years, to get a decently educated person here, that I've tired the opposition out, I think. Now that it's left to me, I'm really at a loss to secure a teacher. It's hard to get one who is qualified to take a place, where you never have money for more than three months' session at a time."

"And when does this session begin?"

"Oh, whenever you like. But I'd rather you would start in October and teach till Christmas. Perhaps by that time you'll be interested enough to give your services for the rest of the year."

I roundly disclaimed any intention of working without being paid, and he laughed as if highly amused, and named the salary, which I had to admit was nearly nothing at all. Then he urged that I should take the fall months, and if my benevolence was not equal to keeping open the school after Christmas he hoped he could get another appropriation.

There were sounds of merriment from the rear of the Baumann cottage, and the master of the house led me directly through to the back piazza. On the steps sat the gentleman whom Lilbud and I had seen on the top of the hill. He was tussling with the two blonde and rugged children I had talked with in the garden. Little Karl he held at arm's length, pretending to trounce him, while the little girl flung herself from one to the other in romping play.

"We'll teach you to hide our things, *Schlingel*," cried the gentleman, and then Mr. Baumann called out and the tumult subsided.

"Miss Dale," said my host as the other rose, "I make you acquainted with Freiherr Max von Baerensprung, Doctor of Philosophy and chief of the forestry department of the dukedom of Hübeningen. He is in this country for purposes of study, and sometimes wastes his time in the manner you have just observed."

"Trautchen, my glasses, quick! that I may

see where to make my bow," cried the gentleman, blinking rather helplessly. When the child restored them to him he made it in very good form, bringing his heels together with a military click. He recognized me and referred to our meeting on the hill.

"You saw me in a costume then which I greatly prefer to the conventional," he said, with humor, "though it may not well support the resounding introduction my friend here has given me. I think we owed each other nothing in curiosity, however, Miss Dale. I have hoped for the opportunity to apologize for the way I stared; but, as a matter of fact, Karl and Trautchen here had sent me out to bring them each a fairy, and I thought the Wald-spuck was come to meet me in your person."

"And what is the Wald-spuck?" I asked.

"Ah, that is a word that cannot be translated. It means the whole enchantment of the forest, fairies, gnomes, witches, everything; and I conceived that in these modern days it might include also such a spectacular appearance in the latest Paris fashions."

"That was going far," I observed with amusement.

"To tell the truth, I am willing to go far to find some consoling evidence of the supernatural in these American woods," he returned. "My walks are lonely enough, the fairies are

scarce and exceedingly wild." He looked at the eaves of the roof as he spoke in grave tones and the two children stood before him open-mouthed and listened. "There are no ruins where they can come together and form little societies for offence and defence. They wander singly or in groups of two and three in a very pitiful way. In the forest near my home they had better accommodation. There was an ancient robber-cave——"

"Oh!" cried Karl.

"——and a ruined watch-tower of Roman times."

"Ach!" cried Trautchen.

"——and a little old Jagdt-Schloss with mossy roof."

"In the darkest part of the woods," cried Karl.

"——and the forester's house was old, old——"

Here Mrs. Baumann hurried out to greet me.

"Fraulein, excuse. I did not hear you come. The *Kinder* make such *Laerm*. What is the Herr Doctor telling you—nonsense?"

"I am speaking of our dear German forest, Frau Gertrude," he explained.

"Ach, der deutsche Wald," she sighed. "Da ist es doch was ganz anderes!"

"You must know," continued the Freiherr to me, "that Mrs. Baumann and her husband and

I come from the same place and played together as children. We have the same homesickness identically."

"I was the Foerster's daughter in Baerensprung," she added. "And my Wilhelm was Forst-gehilfe; and Herr Max our friend always."

"And in the old house I used to get a great deal of very good cake," continued the Freiherr von Baerensprung, once more addressing the children. "Before you were born we ate it, your father and mother and I. It was much better cake than one gets now."

"Mutter's cake is very good now," said Trautchen, without envy. "It stands out there in the Laube. When the coffee ready is we go all out and eat it."

"And the coffee is ready," cried the mother. "Hinauss, alle miteinander. I bring the Gebackenes!"

But Mr. Baumann detained his wife to tell her what he evidently considered an important piece of news: that I had applied for the Caxton school. I was gratified to note the mother's evident satisfaction.

"Ach, das ist ja sehr gut!" she exclaimed, cordially, and then a shade of anxiety crossed her face. "But, Wilhelm, will not that man down there objections make again?" she asked her husband.

"No," he returned, shortly, "he's indifferent. He'll appoint, he says, whomever I recommend."

"Then he lacks malice, and the sum of his villanies is incomplete," put in the Freiherr von Baerensprung in a teasing tone. "I am disappointed, Wilhelm. Have you not promised to show me in his person that rare and interesting specimen, the man who is absolutely bad?"

"I promised nothing of the kind," retorted Mr. Baumann, crossly. "Come all of you, in the Laube we can talk better than here."

The "Laube" to which we repaired was a pretty grape arbor in the midst of the garden, furnished with table and chairs. It was festively set for the afternoon coffee with large cups and plates and knives, and an uncut cake. It was pleasant after my week of camp life to sit down to a fair white cloth once more, flecked prettily with shadows of the moving leaves between us and the sun. Most attractive of all were the children, Karl and Trautchen, sitting up straight, their pretty, rosy faces primly composed. They regarded me with serious round eyes across the table. When I smiled on them Trautchen felt encouraged to enter upon a conversation.

"Where do you live?" she asked me. I pointed southward. "Yes, I thought so," she

continued, nodding. "It is a big, white house, yes, with round posts before? And it has many, many stables, yes?"

"No, my house is small and gray and has only one stable," I returned with amusement.

"Why don't you get that big house?" asked the child. "No one lives therein, I think. You would like it, it is like a palace."

"Trautchen speaks of Caxton," said her father, laughing. "Miss Dale, your costume makes its effect. The child wants to place the first princess it has seen in the only palace it knows."

"Yes, Fraulein, your dress is too fine," said my hostess in round disapproval.

Though I was taken aback at this lack of ceremony, I tried to turn it off easily; but she repeated again, with really uncalled-for severity, that it was "auf fallend" and "extravagant." I saw why in Rolfe, where good manners were the text, this brusque and unceremonious woman could not make friends. Dr. von Baerensprung relieved me from the embarrassment of the situation.

"I'm sure your brothers would totally disagree with Mrs. Baumann on this point, Miss Dale," he said, genially.

"They are absurdly pleased with my pretty things," I admitted, laughing.

"Not in the least absurd," he returned, with

animation. "Good clothes are the basis of a higher life. No one is free until he is dressed in the most becoming garb, no one is influential till he is elegant. I know I could not get the people of Rolfe to hear me on the subject of forestry if I were to go among them in the comfortable smock I have unearthed here among Wilhelm's things; and you, Miss Dale, who are also on a mission of civilization like myself, you must make the most of your city toilettes."

"What is your mission here, Dr. von Baerensprung?" I asked. "Are you the scientist of whom I have already heard, who has revolutionary schemes for developing the county?"

"See how my fame spreads!" he said, with amusement. "It was only about a week ago that I suggested the matter to a few gentlemen I met in New Rome who were curious as to what I could find to busy myself about in this God-forsaken Rolfe. They were considerably amazed at my statement that we had the best water-power down here of the whole region and a site for a great factory."

"Do you really think that?" asked Mr. Baumann, with great interest.

"Why, it's a very simple problem indeed," said Dr. von Baerensprung easily. "Miss Dale, I should like to interest you in it. Here's a mill-stream gone dry because the for-

est about its head-waters has been destroyed. Vegetation, you know, acts like a sponge, holding the moisture and thus giving the springs an even flow throughout the year. Now when all these trees, big and little, were cut off and cattle and pigs were allowed to run wild over the tract, the vegetation was practically destroyed. You can see how the wet season now brings torrents which no mill-dam will withstand, and how in dry season there is no water at all. Now my scheme is for the reforestration of this vast tract of land. By fencing the whole area to keep out animals and by burning fire-lanes, later, to keep the fires in check, the vegetation will get its hold again."

"It would require a big initial outlay of money," said Mr. Baumann, thoughtfully.

"It would be a very sure investment," returned the other. "I recommend it to the attention of anyone interested in the progress of the county. I suppose one could buy the mill-site and that desolate tract of bare land for very little. The fencing would be the chief cost. I believe the present owner is supposed to be in financial difficulties and would be glad to sell."

"Peyton-Call only owns the mill-site, Fanton owns the land," corrected Mr. Baumann.

"I think you are mistaken, Wilhelm. The county map at the court-house shows all that

land east of the turnpike and near the river to belong to the Caxton estate."

"The Peyton-Calls used to own nearly the whole plateau of Rolfe," assented Mr. Baumann. "But since that map was made Colonel Fanton has bought the land you speak of, and he is the man who has cut it bare of timber."

"Is he, indeed? And I have been blaming the present Peyton-Call's father for his stupidity in ruining his own water-power and his son's inheritance!"

"No, that is one of Colonel Fanton's laudable business enterprises," said Mr. Baumann, with a laugh. "He made a fortune on that lumber speculation soon after the war."

"He made it at his neighbor's expense," said Dr. von Baerensprung, thoughtfully. "Well, whom the gods would destroy—! It was madness for Peyton-Call to sell that land without a restriction on the cutting."

"People are so ignorant here," observed Mr. Baumann. "I suppose no one in Rolfe ever heard there was a connection between forest growth and the flow of streams."

"There you are wrong," said Dr. von Baerensprung, triumphantly. "I'm always glad to score against you on such a point, my friend. The relation between forest growth and the flow of streams is practically understood here very well indeed, as I've learned in my talks

with some of the older inhabitants. Several have cited this very example of Peyton Branch. I'm only surprised that in talking about it not one of them has mentioned Colonel Fanton's name as the man who did the mischief."

"No one here mentions anyone else unfavorably," said Mr. Baumann, contemptuously. "The days are not so far back when a man had to be ready to support his criticism of another with a pistol. You'll find no one in Rolfe to tell you that Colonel Fanton is a tricky man in business, though everybody knows it. His cleaning off that timber was entirely in character."

"I don't see how that was a trick," I objected. "It was very ungenerous if he really knew what the effect would be; but if there are no laws against it and he had no agreement with his neighbor, I suppose it was his right."

"There ought to be laws. There ought to have been an agreement;" said the Freiherr von Baerensprung, decidedly. "I'm afraid this good-for-nothing Donald Junior inherits his carelessness from his father, who sold that land. But I shall try, nevertheless, to interest him in this water-power of his."

"I prophesy he won't listen," growled Mr. Baumann.

"If he is at all intelligent my path will be smooth enough," returned the other easily.

I remembered Peyton-Call's deliberate evasion of this very subject on the day I had come down to Rolfe, and I doubted whether the scientist would find his way so smooth; but I kept silent.

"I'll give you your opportunity this evening, Doctor Max. The sooner you know Peyton-Call as he really is, the better," said his host. "I'll go down to the court-house, anyhow; if Miss Dale really wants the school, I will see about the matter at once."

"I want it very much indeed; we need the income," I returned firmly. It irritated me that I should have been thought to mean missionary work in offering to teach the Caxton school.

When I told my brothers that night how I had applied for the school for Archer and myself together, they seemed greatly pleased. Bud proposed that "Son" and I should hold a sort of double examination on the spot.

"It would do me good to hear you-all fire questions at each other, and show each other how smart you are," he said, beamingly. "I ain't educated myself, but I can appreciate education. I reckon you two are about even matched, and could sit here and swap information all night long, and then not be through with all you know."

"I reckon we could, Bud, but there wouldn't be much sense in it, would there?" inquired Archer with some disdain.

"Well, just for the satisfaction of it," said poor Bud, a little taken back by the reserve of the learned.

But Archer and I preferred, for Bud's sake if for no other reason, to examine each other privately. And we arranged for a session in the glen on the following afternoon.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MILL ON THE BRANCH

OUR glen was a spacious level-bottomed place. Laurel and elder thickets alternated with park-like stretches where maples and poplars and hornbeans grew uncrowded. The stream meandered in its deep-cut, narrow bed, now tinkling to a fall under the overhanging bank upheld by roots, now running in noiseless little rapids, now moving through placid pools, its surface broken only by the glancing "mellow-bugs." It was a place designed by nature for happy rest and child's play; but Archer and I sat down solemnly in the sweetly shaded interior, veiled above and on every side with shimmering green, opened his battered schoolbooks, and he began to tell me everything he knew.

At first sight he seemed to have made much of his meagre opportunities. He had mastered his books as far as memorizing the text. He had been the "smart scholar" of the school. His spelling was correct, his calculation quick, his writing well-nigh perfect; but along with these he had learned such a fatal

conceit as fairly staggered me. I saw now why, in applying for the school, he had made one trustee indignant and the other hilarious. I questioned him searchingly on the law-books he had been reading, and soon discovered that they satisfied his vanity rather than his thirst for knowledge. He understood so little of all that he had waded through that it was hard to conceive by what stimulus his industry was kept up. His ambition to study law was based, it appeared, on the respect in which the community held that profession. Vague hints of a brilliant and honor-bringing career, open to anyone who was bold enough to enter thereon, had reached him in devious ways. His ignorant teacher seemed to have been responsible for much of this false stimulus, and for the rest the slight contact the boy had had, from time to time, with the lawyers of the court-house. The fundamental element of Archer's ambition was his conviction that somehow, somewhere, a bright fellow like himself could get honor and glory without further labor.

"I reckon law ain't so hard as they make out when you once get the hang of these books," he said, confidently. "Some folks talk like it's hard to get an education, but I never had any trouble from start to finish. It looked like I was cut out to be a school-teacher, Bud said, when he saw how smart I was."

Alas, Bud! For the sake of his love, for the sake of his pride in "Son," I had to undertake the discouraging task of helping Archer. For my own part, I wished he had, like Bud, learned from the woods alone, and from his tender and open heart. But in books he had gone astray; through books he must be reclaimed. So I set about to find, in all gentleness, some vulnerable point in the boy's armor of self-complacency, some chance for ventilating his stifling conceit.

There was one thing he admitted that he did not know. There had been, in his school, no opportunity to study Latin. An acquaintance with Latin, he was aware, belonged to the education of a lawyer and a gentleman; so much he had gathered from his limited intercourse with the intellectual lights of the county. Colonel Fanton, he thought, could read Latin like he was reading a newspaper; and when Mr. Don prepared for college he had a tutor who, it was rumored, kept him at Latin eight hours a day, and liked to killed him. Archer, therefore, was anxious to make up his little deficiency as quickly as might be. Old Dr. Carson at the court-house, it seemed, had already offered to give him an indefinite number of Latin lessons in return for an indefinite amount of rail-splitting. Before he concluded the bargain Archer wanted to know from some disinterested person how long it took to learn Latin.

"I'll give you a lesson myself, and then I'll make an estimate," I suggested, and he was greatly pleased. He had Dr. Carson's ancient grammar, borrowed for approval, and we began at once. The towels I ought to have been hemming lay neglected at home; in a field near by, Lilbud, the patient, was ploughing in the hot sun, with his new mule, to whom he had to shout continuously; and we two went at our first declension in the shade by the brook-side.

"Now give it to me, Sister, I'll learn it by heart in a few minutes," he said, impatiently, when I had talked awhile. He withdrew to a little distance, and flung himself under a tree to memorize the page. I waited with folded hands awhile, having brought no work down with me; then, finding a patch of moss close to hand, I amused myself idly clearing it of dead leaves and twigs. I had begun to put a neat paling of little sticks around my tiny park when Lee's sharp bark aroused me, and I saw Dr. von Baerensprung approaching me among the trees. I rose, rather hoping he would not notice what I had been playing at, but he saw it as soon as he approached.

"You have an almost morbid passion for improvement," he remarked, after he had greeted me, and he fastened his eye-glasses and peered down at my work. "This real estate has little value, and will not pay you out."

"For a lover of fairies you show yourself very inappreciative," I returned. "It is meant for a little park for the elves. I don't want it to pay."

"An endowed place of public amusement! Good! This is philanthropy on the most improved modern lines," he said, with amusement. I sighed inwardly. The rôle of philanthropist pursued me even in play.

"You must have a grotto in the middle of it," said Dr. von Baerensprung, in a tone of serious interest, still bending over my work. "The proletariat likes grottos with blue lights and little tables for two. I will build you one myself."

He knelt down and began to gather up fragments of bark and pebbles.

"You shall build no grotto on my premises," I objected. "There shall be nothing so commonplace."

"No grotto, no patronage!" he warned me, gravely; but I was unconvinced.

"Then I shall found a rival establishment,' he cried, beginning energetically to clear a space in the moss. "We shall see which will win with the masses, time-honored institutions or newly imported æsthetic fads."

He built his little fence very deftly and with far greater speed than I had mine. I began to feel jealous and sat down to improve my own

work; for a few moments we were absurdly absorbed and silent.

"I observe you have no arch over your entrance," said Dr. von Baerensprung at length, glancing at my handiwork with raised eyebrows. "Is there also a prejudice against that?"

"Against a wooden arch there is more than prejudice, there is architectural principle," I returned with the more warmth because I saw that the bent twig he had placed over his gateway gave a style and finish to his enclosure which mine lacked. He went at the building of his grotto, and I watched with amused interest the construction of the tiny edifice. The gentleman's hands were shapely and expressive of refinement; their motion characteristic; he snatched a stone from the ground, but he poised it with delicate care.

From his hands my eyes caught his face, the profile of which was turned to me. My first impression of his benevolence and refinement was reinforced. After days of intercourse with my simple brothers, it was a peculiar pleasure to see this cultivated stranger. I asked myself whether, as the months and years went by, I should grow indifferent to the things of the world I had left behind; or whether, perhaps, my brothers would learn to value them, to need them as I did now. What influence, for in-

stance, would an acquaintance with this cosmopolitan German have upon my brothers?

As if in response to my thoughts he suddenly spoke to me of Archer. He was anxious to meet, he said, the other member of the faculty of that distinguished educational institution, the Caxton school.

"Are we appointed then?" I exclaimed. He assented, with obvious amusement at my pleasure. I took the opportunity of calling Archer, rising from my seat on the moss.

My brother came a little reluctantly, his open book on his arm. I introduced him, and Dr. von Baerensprung stepped forward in a cordial way to shake hands. I thought he looked at Archer and his book with quizzical interest.

"Brother, we are appointed to the school," I announced, and Archer flushed with pleasure.

"Yes, the great obstructionist was for once complacent," said Dr. von Baerensprung. "He was even amiable, to Mr. Baumann's disappointment. My friend loves a contention."

"Mr. Don was amiable because it was for a lady," said Archer, resentfully. "He don't like me a little bit."

"I dare say you each antagonize the other," suggested Dr. von Baerensprung, looking rather thoughtfully at my brother's vexed and animated face.

"It's the truth," assented Archer, frankly;

"I certainly don't like him. Bud, he swears by Mr. Don, but I haven't the least use in the world for him."

"I found him charming yesterday evening," observed Dr. von Baerensprung. "I went home with him to supper and spent some delightful hours. His is a very beautiful old house."

"It certainly is a fine house," Archer agreed, still scowling. "But blamed if any house in the world would be fine enough to keep me prisoner like that house keeps Mr. Don."

"Why, that's a very keen observation, my friend!" exclaimed the Freiherr von Baerensprung, looking at Archer with increased interest. "I confess you have given me the key to a problem. I was puzzled by my host last night. His inertia was mysterious; for his mind is alert, his feelings alive and delicate. I believe now it is the weight of his inheritance that cripples his will. His traditions have grown too dear to him. He has his mother's portrait there to dream over, her books and work-box and fan are on his desk—and such things interest him more than matters of living moment."

"Mr. Don's mother—" began Archer, and paused.

"Well?" inquired the other with interest.

"There are all sorts of stories about her,"

said Archer. "Mr. Don himself is about the only one who admires her very much, I reckon."

"She was from the North, and therefore unpopular here, just before the war," I put in by way of explanation.

"'Tain't that," insisted Archer. "She was right triflin', they say; spent a heap of money when she didn't have it to spend——"

"I should have gathered from the tone in which the son referred to her that she was of the salt of the earth," said Dr. von Baerensprung, with some gravity. "I think we should respect this filial devotion."

"I reckon people do respect it," returned Archer, with a short laugh. "If Mr. Don decides his mother's a saint, he'll maintain it with a six-shooter against the county. I don't try to avoid trouble myself, but I wouldn't like to let him hear me mention his mother without taking off my hat."

Dr. von Baerensprung now noted the Latin grammar on Archer's arm.

"Books by the running brooks?" he inquired with light reproach. "I'm glad I interrupted you."

"I think myself it would be nicer to have the trees talk to us," I put in, feelingly.

"I don't see that," objected Archer. "Can a swamp-maple learn you Latin?"

Dr. von Baerensprung's eyes danced with amusement.

"Latin is the one thing my brother doesn't know," I said, with my gravity maintained. "He's very anxious to make it up with all possible speed."

"What use do you intend to make of it?" inquired the Freiherr of Archer.

"I want to know it just for so," returned Archer.

"That's the best reason in the world for studying a thing," agreed the other. "But it's a good thing to apply new knowledge promptly. I have a proposition to make you, Mr. Dale. I need for the monograph I am preparing a list of all the trees of this vicinity with their Latin names. If I can engage your services as my secretary in preparing this list, you will have a chance to learn some Latin in the course of the work."

Archer looked confused and hesitated. I urged him to accept. Dr. von Baerensprung offered liberal terms, and presently it was arranged. My satisfaction knew no bounds. I saw what must be the effect of contact for Archer with this cultivated and genial man. The fact that Archer was shy with the scientist was the first good sign that he recognized his superior.

"And I'll give you Latin lessons myself,"

continued Dr. von Baerensprung, genially. "Your sister hasn't any time for such unimportant business as that."

Archer was delighted with this; to flourish a book before him was to stimulate him. He accepted the offer without heeding my exclamation of protest.

"You are too good. You are making yourself trouble," I objected.

"Not at all. I really need just the wide-awake assistant your brother will be to me," returned Dr. von Baerensprung, frankly. "I have seen your letters, Mr. Archer, to Wilhelm Baumann, and I like your clear hand-writing. I almost believe you could draw."

"I've never tried, but I reckon it's easy enough," replied Archer, with a pleased laugh.

"Well, so it is; the drawing I need for my work," he answered. "Photography is another matter. I loathe it. In fact, I dislike almost every occupation incident to my studies, Miss Dale; and the first thing I do when I reach a new field is to look about for assistants. I've had my eye on Archer for some time."

We invited our caller to the house; but he excused himself.

"I have been there already," he said, "and interrupted your brother Bud and your landlord, who were talking over the faults of the latter's horse. It bade fair to be an all-after-

noon consultation, and I felt sure I should be in the way. I wish I could see Caxton so animated over my business scheme as he is to-day over his new horse."

"He didn't respond to your scientific advice?" I asked, a little amusedly.

"His unconcern last night was impregnable," returned Dr. von Baerensprung, with a laugh. "Well, I can only try again; my plan is too pretty to relinquish it. If I fail with Caxton, Miss Dale, I still have hope of you."

"Surely not," I returned, quickly. "You would waste your time, Dr. von Baerensprung. I shall never have the slightest interest in a business enterprise."

"Then support me with a sympathetic interest in the scientific side of the question," he urged, amiably. "Have you seen the mill-site yet, Miss Dale? No? Have not you and your brother time to walk down there now? It is a picturesque ruin, the mill; and I will engage to spoil the romance as little as possible with my lecture on economics. I shall want to practise a style of presentation that shall some time appeal to the romantic and frivolous nature of Caxton himself."

"You all mind what you say about him, yonder he comes right now," Archer warned us.

In truth, the master of Caxton, riding-whip in hand, appeared sauntering toward us down

the glen. He presently noticed we were looking up, and quickened his pace. As he took off his hat, the sun between the trees fell on his red hair with fine effect. Altogether he was an imposing figure, with the green shadowy glen to frame him. Dr. von Baerensprung's face lighted with pleasure.

"Say what you will, a man of that bearing has his uses," he had time to murmur. "For my part, I like him."

Archer, for his part, all but scowled as our landlord approached us.

"I have been to the house, Miss Dale, to pay my respects to you," said Mr. Peyton-Call, after greeting us all, "and took in good faith Bud's statement that you were not at home. Please imagine my resentment now at chancing upon you, close at hand, entertaining another caller."

"Be humble," advised Dr. von Baerensprung, cheerfully. "I owe my advantage over you, Mr. Peyton-Call, to my superior merits. My cunning scepticism in not believing Miss Dale's brother, my boldness in searching the premises for myself——"

"It is a question," retorted the other, "whether cunning and boldness ought to win over trustfulness and patience. I have been lingering at the house, waiting for Miss Dale's return."

"Where did you leave your horse, Mr. Peyton-Call?" I inquired, just by the way of showing I was not too deeply impressed with the honor of his special call on me. He recognized the mild rebuff, and stuck to his point with some assurance.

"I lingered so long I had to make an excuse, and I've left my horse with Bud to cure him of shying," he said. "I really like a shying horse. It keeps me from too much sleep while I ride. And now I'm punished for dissembling to Bud by having to walk home. I hate walking; in fact, I can't walk."

"I'm so sorry," I said, with polite regret. "I was just going to ask you to join us in a walk. Dr. von Baerensprung wants to show us the ruined mill on the branch."

There flashed an inexplicable change over Peyton-Call's face. His eyes narrowed slightly as he looked at me, his lips set themselves curiously. Had the idea not been too absurd I should have said it expressed hostility.

"Then I feel I must accompany you," he said, a little slowly. "The ruin is haunted; you will need my protection."

"I reckon we could fix the hants!" observed Archer, in no very gracious tone. He was swinging from the limb of a tree under which we stood, idly and restlessly like a boy; and Mr. Peyton-Call glanced toward him with

that absent-minded unconcern one gives a child.

"By all means let us be cautious, and take the owner of the ghosts along with us," said the Freiherr von Baerensprung. He was turning down-stream at once, and I was ready to go; but Mr. Peyton-Call stood stock still, and as he talked we were polite to stand about and listen.

"I suppose I own the ruin, but I disclaim the ghosts," he said, negligently. "I should be glad to see them scattered. Perhaps Miss Dale's entrance will be salutary. Perhaps it will dispel them forever."

"Don't they pay rent?" I inquired.

"What a preposterous question!" he exclaimed, and really looked put out. "I suppose, Miss Dale, you've always had your rents collected by an able bailiff, and you can't imagine what unhallowed association this subject has for me."

"Indeed, I've collected rents in person many a time," I returned, willing enough to seize an opportunity now and then to let people know I had been Mrs. Reman's hard-worked agent, and not her petted favorite. "In my foster-mother's model tenements I used to have to collect the rents, and scold the people for not scrubbing their stairs; and I've walked through miles of slums to this work, Mr. Peyton-Call:

whereas you have only to ride leisurely about through green woods and fields."

"Is that the sort of thing you come from?" he asked, with an air of comprehending me at last. "Charity work?"

"I would have come away from it myself," put in Dr. von Baerensprung, affecting a light shudder. "There's one crisp and significant expression in your language, 'cold as charity.'"

"Rolfe is an unpromising field for you, Miss Dale," said Mr. Peyton-Call, with a light note of defiance in his voice. I would very gladly have dispelled his very natural dismay at finding he had brought, in his own coach, a professional philanthropist into his native county. "You will soon be tired," he added, as if to reassure himself, "of your limited opportunities for doing good down here."

"Miss Dale will not permit herself to be limited," put in Dr. von Baerensprung, promptly. "Her interests are for vast improvements. She means to establish in Rolfe enormous public parks——"

He was looking at the ground with evident amusement, and I glanced down to see that Mr. Peyton-Call was standing squarely in the midst of our miniature parks. One foot was in my enclosure, the other against the ruins of my playmate's grotto. I did not care to make Mr. Peyton-Call aware of my childish amuse-

ment, and so I left unexplained what the Dr. von Baerensprung had meant in referring to my vast designs. We turned down-stream for our walk, and Mr. Peyton-Call joined us without further invitation.

At the foot of the glen we emerged on the banks of the mill-stream, now but a small brook that lost itself in the wide rocky bed it once had filled. We were in a tangle of grape-vines and underbrush on the bank, and for better progress we descended to the dry bed of the stream and advanced downward among the bowlders. Meanwhile Mr. Peyton-Call and Dr. von Baerensprung talked pleasantly to each other. The master of Caxton regretted that his guest had gone home so early the night before, they had had a good game after he left. The other responded that he had hoped to speak to Mr. Peyton-Call at the court-house that morning, but had seen him so surrounded by lawyers he had not dared to approach. The other laughed easily.

"I wish you and Mr. Baumann had joined our group," he said. "You would have heard some sound doctrine on the subject of road-building. The proposed tax has interested everyone."

"Nothing seems more pressing than that public interest on that subject should be aroused," observed Dr. von Baerensprung. "I have been in all quarters of the globe, and

seen bad roads, I think, but Rolfe County offers the worst examples."

"I trust you are not deceived," said Mr. Peyton-Call, idly. "We are at present walking in the dry bed of what was once a considerable stream, and not in a road at all. We have several turnpikes in Rolfe that are appreciably better than this."

Dr. von Baerensprung was hugely amused at his impudence.

"Well, you know how to disarm criticism," he observed.

"We are practised to that art from early youth," returned Mr. Peyton-Call. "It comes to this—disarm criticism, or you die! Your friend, Mr. Baumann, has shown you what blood-thirsty attacks we have to expect."

"My friend is hot-headed," admitted the Doctor. "I hear him rave over county matters. But though I have not entered into the merits of the several controversies, I feel sure you will always find him on the side of good sense and progress."

"I don't find him there, I see him there," returned Mr. Peyton-Call. "We are invariably opposed."

"Then you don't claim for yourself——"

"Good sense and progress? No! They always appear to conflict directly with my individual interests, so that I think of them as a

pair of severe and disapproving aunts—I have had such—withholding cake and pretending hypocritically it is for my own good. As for the new taxes, if they are to be levied solely on the land I may as well stare ruin in the face. It is difficult to get off my own land hereabout, while Mr. Baumann has, I have heard, only about eighty acres. If the tax were on productive land, I would not complain; but I have less under cultivation than Mr. Baumann."

Dr. von Baerensprung almost imperceptibly shook his head.

"You have given up farming entirely, Mr. Peyton-Call?" he asked.

"Not entirely; I am still devoted to some of its special branches—fox-hunting, and horse-racing, and visiting my tenants. In fact, the quiet pleasures of a rural life particularly appeal to me. I am fit for nothing else."

If Dr. von Baerensprung had hoped to lead the conversation into profitable channels, he presently gave it up, and fell a little behind to talk to Archer. I admired his serenity; for my part, I was not far from impatient with Mr. Peyton-Call. Perhaps he felt my disapprobation, and as he helped me courteously over the rocks, attempted, in his own way, an apology.

"Can I be excused if I dwell with more insistence than good taste on my own peculiari-

ties?" he asked. "It is the pitiful resource of the native who fears extinction."

"Extinction? By whom?"

"By the good and the great who have recently come among us bringing the gifts of civilization—by yourself and Dr. von Baerensprung."

"He may be bringing you such gifts. I certainly am not."

"As to that, I consider you the more dangerous of the two new influences." Mr. Peyton-Call had a great air of being serious. "Our friend, the forest expert, while he is perfectly willing to make trouble, will evidently not insist on doing so. He may leave Rolfe as suddenly as he has descended upon it. You, however, announce that you mean to stay. You are already revolutionizing matters. I actually find all three of your brothers at home and at work, and the little house itself is struggling to be worthy of you. If you extend your beneficent influence at this rate, you will soon make the county uninhabitable to the good-for-nothing class which I have the honor to represent."

"I am glad you now claim only to stand for one class," I said, lightly. "At first it was all of Rolfe you offered to represent, and I should be sorry to find my native county as inhospitably disposed as you are. Everyone else has so far welcomed me."

"Others have not had my opportunity of rec-

ognizing your true character," he returned, coolly enough. "They are dazzled by your appearance, pleased as children to find you graciously disposed. I look beneath the surface and see you severe and energetic."

"A missionary, a reformer, everything to make one's hair stand on end," I suggested, rather pleased to find a person who shared my dearest antipathy.

"My hair doesn't stand on end, for though I recognize you as an enemy," he said in really affable tone, "I do not fear you."

"Your courage amazes me."

"You speak mockingly, Miss Dale; yet you dare not deny my accusation—that you mean well by your native county."

"I do deny it, sir; I have never meant well. I have sometimes been forced to act well, but I have never liked it."

As he laughed, I looked back after the others. Dr. von Baerensprung and Archer were clambering up the bank of the stream a short distance behind us.

"We stop to measure this tulip-tree," called the scientist. "We will meet you at the ruin;" and he waved us on.

"But I have proofs in support of my accusation," my companion continued his absurd attack. "You have taken the Caxton school. That confirms my worst suspicions. What bet-

ter field than a school to begin the insidious reforms that are to overthrow us?"

"You are really a generous antagonist, Mr. Peyton-Call. You could have kept me out of the school, I understand. I have to thank you."

"Don't thank me, but be generous in turn; refrain, for example, from letting Dr. von Baerensprung lecture to the children on forestry."

"Surely, a better knowledge of forestry in Rolfe would not raise your taxes."

"All kinds of knowledge raise taxes," he complained.

"And as for forestry," I continued, "from what I hear, your property would benefit by an application of Dr. von Baerensprung's science. He has talked to you, I suppose, about reforestration."

"I suppose he has," returned the master of Caxton serenely. "I don't recall it. It's impossible for me to follow intelligently a discourse which does not interest me. My mind seems to have been dulled by my retired and isolated life. I generally fall asleep while others talk."

"And wake in time," I thought with amusement, "to make an impertinent reply."

"And this, re-re-re—what is it?" he asked, carelessly. "Reforestration? Thank you, Miss Dale. Has he talked to you about it?"

"Oh, a great deal," I answered, rather absent-mindedly. I was wondering how much of this indolence was natural to the man, how much he had acquired to suit his "isolated and retired life." He was of lithe and vigorous build, his eyes were watchful, veiled in determination. Well, a hunter might have that bearing and that look, I thought, and yet be honest in protesting he had no capacity for business.

"I know it gratifies him to find you responsive," said he. My mind had wandered; for the moment I was in doubt as to what he meant. Before I could ask, however, Mr. Peyton-Call gave a low exclamation of surprise.

"Ah! I told you the mill was haunted," he murmured, and I followed the direction of his gaze.

Under the arching branches of the tree down stream, standing high on a great flat rock that sloped gently to the water, and outlined against an old stone building beyond, were two figures on horseback—Virgie Fanton and my brother Bud. He was mounted on Mr. Peyton-Call's horse, entrusted to him an hour ago; he had his hand on the mane of her horse and so bent toward her; and her face was raised with a laughing look to his. As I paused, speechless with surprise, Virgie saw us. She raised her riding whip in merry salute and her call came up with the rushing water. Bud looked up

then, took off his broad-brimmed hat and waved it easily; and we advanced in silence to the rock.

"Where are you two bound?" called Virgie, gayly, when we were within earshot. It was a question I was minded to fling back at her. A look at Bud's radiant face made my heart sink very low.

"Well, how does he go, Bud?" asked Mr. Peyton-Call pleasantly, referring to the horse.

"Nothin' in the world but foolishness the matter with him," returned Bud. "His eye is all right. He shies that-a-way, I reckon, just for meanness. But a horse don't stay mean when I ride him."

"You certainly have improved him already, Mr. Dale, and I'm going to turn over my colts to you," said Virgie, cordially. "I've been riding up and down the road with your brother," she explained to me, "just overcome with admiration at the way he manages the beast. I'm so glad you weren't at home, Cassy; I wouldn't have missed this lesson in horse-training. Mr. Dale has told me how to get Kitty a little quieter, too. How in the world do you come to know so much about horses, Mr. Dale?"

"I declare I don't know any more than you do, Miss Virgie," protested Bud. "But it just naturally comes to me how to do with a horse."

As they talked the two had dismounted, and we stood in a group on the rock that spread its broad surface just above a considerable waterfall. Beneath us, rising from a dark pool, stood the walls of the ruined mill. All about the forest had encroached with vivid green, and the western sun was peering into the enclosure. It was an ironically charming setting for what to me was a very unpleasant scene. I had witnessed Mr. Peyton-Call's start at finding his lady in company with his horse-trainer; I remembered with dismay Virgie's several complaints that her betrothed was neglecting her; it seemed as if Puck's mischief had devised this particular situation. But ten times more distressing than any considerations about the betrothed pair was my sudden anxiety for Bud.

"Sit down, Cassy, let's enjoy this lovely spot," urged Virgie; "that is, unless you-all were going somewhere."

"We were coming here," said Mr. Peyton-Call, and I was grateful for his well-bred tranquillity. Bud led the horses to one side and hitched them to some saplings. We sat down on the rock platform above the pool, Virgie and I together, the men each on the wrong side of us.

"Isn't this nice!" cried Virgie with delight.

"If you will listen to me now, Miss Dale," said Mr. Peyton-Call on the other side of me,

"I think I can prove that you are taking Rolfe entirely wrong."

"This certainly is a pretty place," said Bud, languorously, looking at Virgie alone.

"It's mine," she said, playfully, "but you may come here any time you like."

"I'd like for to stay forever," said he.

"Well, you may," she returned, graciously. "I'll see that they don't disturb you by building a horrid mill."

"Miss Dale," said Mr. Peyton-Call to me, "I see your profile against the gray of that stone masonry yonder, and I see—" I turned upon him flushing and he gave me a daring smile —"a strong likeness to your brother Bud," he finished, coolly.

"It's the truth," Virgie affirmed, with a gracious air; I was too much disturbed by Mr. Peyton-Call to enjoy the compliment.

"You sit enthroned," he continued, in a low voice, "over these falling waters, as if in judgment over them for being so idle and useless. Your look is stern. You are computing the prosy possibilities of this charming spot. Meanwhile the spirits of the place, quite unabashed, are enjoying you in their own way. The sunlight is playing most disrespectfully with your hair, the rock warms where you rest your hand, the waters hush, hoping to hear you speak."

The tone in which he brought forward this nonsense was entirely reprehensible. If he wanted to get even with his coquettish lady, I thought he might have chosen another way. To involve me any further in their affair was outrageous.

"Why, it's mighty nigh sunset," cried Virgie. "We ought to have brought supper down here. I've aimed to give you a picnic on this rock, Cassy, one of these days. I've had so many good suppers here, just to look around makes me right hungry."

"I'll get you something to eat right now, Miss Virgie," offered Bud, gathering himself up.

"I move that the people who are mounted ride away in search of food," suggested Mr. Peyton-Call, "while the pedestrians keep camp."

"Will you-all stay here while Mr. Dale and I go and get up a picnic?" asked Virgie, enthusiastically.

"Certainly," and "Certainly not." Mr. Peyton-Call and I spoke in one breath.

"No picnic for me," I said, rising to my feet. "Archer and Dr. von Baerensprung will be here presently, and then I must go home. Give Mr. Peyton-Call his horse, Brother, so that he can escort Miss Fanton."

To do Bud justice, he arose obediently at my request. The protest came from the unmanageable Peyton-Call.

"I can't ride that horse until Bud has trained him," he remarked. "I don't consider him safe. I'd rather walk than risk my neck."

Virgie and Bud laughed merrily and moved toward the horses. Mr. Peyton-Call remained standing beside me. I was sorry to be serious with him; but I had Bud to look out for.

"Mr. Peyton-Call," I said, in a slightly lowered tone, "I am not so much interested in your safety as in my brother's. I beg you will take your horse yourself."

"Don't beg," he said. "Command."

"Come, Bud!" I called. "I must go. We have missed Dr. von Baerensprung and Archer."

But our companions of the walk were even then approaching us through the woods. We heard their animated conversation and presently they emerged upon the rock. Archer's face was glowing; evidently his new friend had captivated him.

Dr. von Baerensprung followed Virgie to shake hands with her.

"You are not going," he protested.

"I want to stay," said Virgie, plaintively. "I feel just like having a picnic; but nobody will join me. Don't *you* want to have a picnic, Dr. von Baerensprung?"

"It belongs to my theory of life to fill it with a succession of picnics," he responded. "But

heretofore opportunity has held herself aloof, occasion has remained submerged."

"Then you are ready?" she cried, delightedly.

"Miss Fanton, the optimistic philosopher is always ready for the sudden favor of fortune."

"Who else is optimistic here?" demanded Virgie, turning. "You, Mr. Dale?"

"If it means a picnic," said Bud, "I reckon I'm optimistic, too."

"And you, Cassy, I sha'n't ask you whether you are ready or not. You are here and you must stay till I come back," said Virgie, commandingly.

"Lilbud is waiting for his supper," I began.

"You stay, sister," said Archer, hastily. "Lilbud and I can fix our own supper. We've done it many a time."

And having still the grace of shyness he declined Virgie's prompt invitation to himself and Lilbud and started off upstream.

"One moment, my boy," cried his new employer, and followed him a few steps.

"Then Bud and I will wait," I said, rather reluctantly taking my seat again. I was in no mood for the proposed festivity.

"Don will stay with you," Virgie decreed, carelessly. "I've been telling Mr. Dale about my colts, and sunset's the time to see them in the paddock; so come up to The Terraces with me, Mr. Dale."

"You told me a moment ago to command you," I said aside to Mr. Peyton-Call. He walked away to the horses and mounted Virgie. Then, to my surprise and chagrin, I saw that, without a word, he let Bud mount the other horse; as the two rode away he came back slowly to where I sat.

"When the commands of two ladies contradict each other," he said, airily, "the man in bondage finds the rare opportunity of pleasing himself."

And he dropped into an attitude of lounging content upon the rock below me.

CHAPTER IX

A PICNIC AND SOME GHOSTS

DR. VON BAERENSPRUNG made one more attempt as we sat there above the pool to interest the master of Caxton in his own water-power. He failed signally, and it was characteristic of the genial German that he entered very cheerfully upon subjects which the other would discuss. My mind was with Bud; I was too distraught to follow very attentively, and I could only half respond to their appeals for my opinion. Presently twilight fell, and they themselves grew silent. We listened to the dashing waters, to the evening wind in the trees. It grew dark in the shadows of the pool, in the forest around us. Delicate fresh odors assailed us with every passing breath of air. Now the whippoorwills began their eerie calling far and near. Slowly the peace of the coming night laid its charm on me, set my anxiety at rest. I had been absurdly startled because Bud had been noticed; I had imagined he looked too happy over it; I had mistrusted Virgie too quickly. She was kind and generous, and Peyton-Call at least was

proud. I could rely on these my neighbors—they would not carelessly wrong me or mine. Before we heard the merry hubbub of the picnic party advancing I had become reassured.

Whereas two had departed on horseback, quite a party returned in vehicles; there was shouting and calling hither and thither as the old Dayton from The Terraces, followed by a buggy, made their way from the road through the woods as far as the rock. Virgie's own Mammy Juliet, it appeared, was driving in front; Virgie and her cousin, Miss Lucy Call, were in the wagon with her, and both were calling advice to the people who followed.

"Mind now, Blair Lathrop, you follow Mammy here," called Virgie; "she knows the road, and you-all don't."

"For land's sakes, Blair, don't upset!" warned Miss Lucy, anxiously. "All the dishes are in your buggy."

Then came a peal of laughter from the young people who were in the buggy with the dishes.

"Hi! What's dis yere snag in de road?" whooped Mammy. "Hold on, ole hoss, whoa!"

"Don, you no-'count, lazy thing, come here and take this brush out of our way," called Virgie. "It's *that* dark!"

"Back off, Mammy, you'll go over a stump here," advised Peyton-Call, already at the horse's head.

"Turn loose my ole hoss, Mr. Don, I kin see," returned Mammy, excitedly.

"Let Don lead him, Mammy," urged Miss Lucy Call.

"And you-all git yo' necks broke?" demanded Mammy, firmly. "Time you start to fool with dis yere ole hoss's bridle, he'll r'ar as sho's you bawn."

Indeed, the horse was beginning to plunge and back among the brush. Mammy slapped his back with the reins and screamed, "Whoa, whoa!" and Dr. von Baerensprung and I came up in alarm.

"Get out, all of you, right here," commanded Peyton-Call, springing to the bridle. "You ought to have had a lantern, Virgie; and I wonder at your letting Mammy drive this old brute in the dark. Where's Bud?"

"I sent him to the court-house to tell papa where we had all gone," explained Virgie, springing out. "Here, Blair, help Cousin Lucy. Dr. Dyer, is your horse all right? Where are you, Cassy?"

And then in the dark she introduced Miss Dyer and her brother, the young physician from the court-house, and Mr. Blair Lathrop to Dr. von Baerensprung and myself.

It was quickly apparent that Virgie and Mammy Juliet were accustomed to the management of picnics at the mill. There was a

prescribed order of unpacking and making a fire in the usual place on the rock—there was an understanding as to the division of duties. Mammy went at the cooking, Virgie opened the baskets and spread the cloth. With a few concise and playful commands she set the men to stirring about on useful errands. This preparation for the supper, moreover, was a very charming part of the entertainment; for our hostess forgot no one in chatting along easily, her voice high and clear above the falling waters.

"Everything in that basket goes on the middle of the cloth, Don. Dr. Dyer, haven't you-all a cushion seat in your buggy you could contribute to our dining-room furniture? Blair Lathrop, take that bucket there" ("please" was not in Virgie's vocabulary, her coaxing intonation supplied the lack), "and get us some water for the coffee. Mind you don't bring the spring-keeper again. You don't know what a spring-keeper is, Dr. von Baerensprung? The little squirmy creature that stays in a spring to keep the water sweet? Don't you-all have them in Germany? You ought to go along and let Mr. Lathrop show him to you. Cousin Lucy, do pray take my cape to sit on, the rock isn't comfortable! Mind, Mammy, you don't burn your dress; I declare you could sit in the fire and never feel it!"

"Tain't worth while to bother 'bout me, honey," returned the old woman, and I saw where Virgie had caught her favorite airy expression. It was "'tain't worth while" at every other word with her, the phrase which she liked to accompany with a sweeping gesture of the hand. In truth, Virgie's speech was of the kind which to the undiscriminating Northern ear would be "exactly like a darky." I had already been South long enough to realize the vast difference. Virgie's speech was playfully, deliberately colloquial; to see her queening it now upon the firelit rock was to realize in her the high-bred little lady. I watched her with a contemplative amusement; I looked from her to her betrothed, whose graceful bearing did not conceal his innate haughtiness; and I wondered how that practical joker, Fate, had hit upon the thought to throw us Dales into an intimacy with these two.

As I stood one side, conscious that I was not needed to help, Mr. Peyton-Call came up to me.

"Miss Dale, this is your opportunity to visit my ghosts. Come down around the mill, I will exhibit them," he proposed, amiably.

"Miss Dyer, will you dare to go stir up the haunts?" I asked that young lady, who was laughingly retreating from the smoke, which she declared was following her around the fire.

She joined us readily, and we clambered down the rock to the dark, straight walls of the ruin, and passed around to the down-stream side. There, looking through the arched doorway, we paused. The stars shone into the roofless interior. The walls looked all the blacker for the red glow through the upper windows from our camp-fire on the rock."

"Mm—*Mm!* I wouldn't go in there for something pretty," exclaimed Miss Dyer. "Don't you *know* the snakes are just a-switchin' about among those fallen stones!"

"Nothing of the sort!" protested Mr. Peyton-Call. "Come, step over the sill."

"Don't tell me, I know better," she cried. "I never take a man's opinion about snakes. You-all can go in, I'll stay right here and listen to your expiring groans."

"I'll make a light," he proposed, and after groping about for some dry leaves and sticks he entered the mill. Presently he struck a match and we saw him in the middle of the ruin, bending over the pile. The flame caught and blazed up, lighting the bare stone walls with ghostly effect. Miss Dyer and I advanced, cautiously gathering up our skirts to our escort's amusement; the switching snakes did not appear. The cellar-floor of the old mill was piled with stones overgrown with vines. Small trees among the débris bore evidences of how

long the place had lain fallen to decay. In the growing firelight the foliage shone in tenderest green; and the smoke rose in a straight black column to the starlit sky.

Presently there were exclamations and shouts from our friends on the rock without.

"Look at the mill!"

"Great day in the mornin', it's the hants!"

"Isn't that too sweet and pretty for anything!"

"Who's down in there, anyhow?"

"So you've no real ghosts after all, and we are forced into the rôle," I said to Mr. Peyton-Call; and then, suddenly, a high, clear call overhead made me start and look up.

There stood Virgie lightly poised in an aperture of the wall above us, looking as though she must have floated there. Our light was on the apparition with lovely effect; for background she had the flamelit smoke from the fire on the rock; she was fragile, startling, unreal and wholly lovely!

After the first shock of surprise at seeing her so high, I remembered the artificial incline outside which led to this ancient doorway of the mill's first floor where she was standing.

"Virgie, step back; the masonry might crumble," commanded Peyton-Call with a ring of alarm in his voice, and he advanced to the base of the wall as he spoke. Virgie did not move, but smiled playfully down at him.

"It certainly is fun to scare you one time, Don," she sang out, cheerily. "Do you reckon I'll be killed; or will you catch me?"

He extended his arms and down she came, like a little cat. He caught her easily; but Miss Dyer's scream and mine were echoed by cries from those outside who had seen her disappear.

"You certainly are awkward, Don," she scolded, as he swung her to her feet. "'Twasn't worth while to let me hurt my hand on your horrid old buttons. I'm all right," she called up as the frightened faces appeared in the aperture above. "I just took a little jump! Don't crowd there, Don thinks it isn't safe."

"Ain't my chile hurted?" wailed Mammy Juliet, her dark face nearly ashen gray with fright.

"Oh, go along, all of you, you-all! What a fuss for nothing!" cried Virgie. "You'd better tend to your bread. Mammy, we're coming right now to eat supper."

"Let me see your hand, Virgie, where you hurt it," asked her betrothed, as the people above withdrew. She paid no attention to his request, and he did not insist. I was moving to the door and he followed me and helped me cross the sill.

"Virgie, that was the most like you of any-

thing I ever saw you do," exclaimed Miss Dyer, between reproach and admiration. "I wouldn't have dared for a million dollars; would you, Miss Dale?"

"Good Heavens!" I ejaculated, glancing back to the height in question. "One would need a heart bound in triple brass to fling one's self from there."

"You don't know how you hurt my feelings," said Mr. Peyton-Call.

Everyone had something to say about Virgie's bit of daring when we reached the rock again. The most severe comment of all was Dr. von Baerensprung's, uttered to me aside.

"An outrageous folly," he said. "Unless the two have been raised in a troupe of acrobats it was really dangerous—to say nothing of its being a somewhat eccentric proceeding. I know that sixth cousins are considered near of kin hereabout, but even then——"

"You know, don't you, that they are betrothed?" said I.

"No, surely not!" he exclaimed. "Do you really mean it? Why then I've unconsciously been in the exceedingly awkward position of advising the man what to do with his future wife's property;—that is to say, I should have made that blunder but for Caxton's indifference, which never let me get so far. So they are to be married, are they, and the money

Fanton made at the expense of Caxton will go back? There's a little piece of justice from the hands of Fate! Only we're not so sure of it! This letting his lady fling herself from a precipice doesn't speak well for his devotion."

"You don't know what happened," I returned. "Mr. Peyton-Call acted exactly right. He begged her to step back, and when she would jump, he caught her."

"Well, if he is all devotion," he said, with a laugh, "it's rather strange that Miss Fanton is never seen without a man or two dancing attendance, and that her betrothed is never greatly in the foreground. He is a little too humble for nature. Witness his letting your brother attend her this evening instead of going himself. Of course, it was her fault, too——"

"I'm sure you haven't understood Miss Fanton," I returned, warmly.

"Don't tell a man of my age how to recognize a coquette," he said, serenely; and having, quite unconsciously, made me thoroughly unhappy, he led me to the supper which had just been called.

Bud appeared as we were seating ourselves about the spread cloth on the rock and reported that he had found Colonel Fanton and delivered to him the ladies' messages.

"And he charged me to tell you-all not to keep the horses out all night," he finished.

"I'm so glad I'm not a horse, to have papa thinkin' about me like that," observed Virgie, coolly.

Mammy kept to her post at the fire, still broiling bacon and chicken, and turning corncakes and flapjacks, and keeping hot the coffee. Bud and Mr. Peyton-Call went to and fro in waiting on us all. Virgie seemed to eat nothing herself in her attention to serve her guests.

"All these cups and plates and fixings are in your honor, Cassy, yours and Dr. von Baerensprung's," she chatted. "On picnics like this, when we haven't such distinguished guests, we take turns drinking out of the lid of the milk bucket any time, and we wait in a neighborly way for the knife."

"And so this delightful meal is really an institution with you?" inquired Dr. von Baerensprung, well pleased.

"I reckon it seems right primitive to you," suggested Virgie.

"On the contrary, it's an evidence of the highest social development, the ease with which you get up this entertainment," he cried with animation.

"Do you hear that, Miss Dale?" inquired Mr. Peyton-Call, who had just taken his place across the cloth from me. "We're already developed to the highest pitch here in Rolfe."

"I'm sure Miss Dale agrees with me," said

Dr. von Baerensprung. "I'm sure she admires, as I do, the great flexibility of the individual will which makes such a picnic possible among you. Here are nine people on a frolic and there has been no discussion as to what should be done. What one has proposed the others serenely accept. The 'good time' alone is sacred. Idiosyncrasies, personal whims, are gracefully laid aside."

"Yes, indeed," assented Virgie, and her face dimpled prettily in the firelight. "Who would be so inconsiderate as to wish to be considered? I never consider anybody!"

CHAPTER X

A SUMMER AND ITS FRUITS

ARCHER'S new employment under Dr. von Baerensprung proved more significant for him than I had even hoped. It appeared from the first that the boy respected and trusted his patron; and so his greatest spiritual need, the contact with his superior, was supplied. He came daily from his work with glowing accounts of his master's wit and learning. In truth, Dr. von Baerensprung devoted what time he could spare to teaching Archer.

"The Latin is nothing; he receives it through a little funnel stuck into his head as the people of old Nürnberg received their wit," the scientist told me; "but my young friend is not so far astray as yet from the woodsman's lore; and when he once gets disillusioned about the value of books he will do good work in forestry. With your permission, Miss Dale, I will bend the twig so that the tree may be inclined."

And when I tried to thank him for the help he was bringing us, he assured me genially he was merely amusing himself; that he was get-

ting a great deal of drudgery done through Archer; that he was repaid for any trouble by his social intercourse with us all; the Dales were the most romantic and picturesque family he had ever known; he never saw Goldy-Locks and the Three Bears sit down together at table without reviving the fairy-tale pleasures of his youth.

"Moreover, I owe you a good turn for teaching me to take Rolfe aright," he added. "Since you have told me that you have chosen it in preference to wealth" (I had explained myself to him as to no one else, to show him how material a benefit his kindness was to my younger brother), "since you have assured me that you liked the good old county unimproved, I have lost my own rage for improving it. Before you came, Miss Dale, I was under Wilhelm Baumann's influence; I meant to do my little best to destroy the peace of Rolfe with factories and other horrors. When you first entrusted me with the secret that you are not the capitalist we took you for, I was grievously disappointed. Now I also look down upon all that sort of thing from a sunny height of indifference."

The wild and uncouth negress whom Bud engaged as maid for me was great and bony, black as forest mould, and called herself Pearl. She wore in the house, as well as out-of-doors, a

basin-shaped hat of straw from under which her eyes gleamed forth untamed. Before she had been at work in the house many minutes she was wailing a most dismal melody with words like these:

"Young people who delights in sin,
Gwine tell yo' what has lately been,
Dere's no hidin'-place down hyar!"

Bud had introduced her as "nothin' but a fiel'-hand," but as one who was willing to learn. I took "fiel'-hand" to mean something quite undeveloped and groping in darkness, so that to my personal fear of the creature was added a great discouragement at the outset of her training. But Pearl proved as harmless as she was noisy; and rather capable, though not on the most dainty lines. How she was a "fiel'-hand" I learned on the day when Lilbud, who had to go to the store on an errand, came to me with the request that Pearl should finish his ploughing.

"Can you plough?" I asked my domestic in amazement. She grinned broadly.

"Lawdee! Yes'm! Dat's jes what I kin do!"

"Well, do you want to?"

"Whoopee! Yes'm! I sho' do!"

She went at it with ardor, and I leaned on the fence to watch her, for I had never seen a woman at such work before. My inter-

est filled her with amusement. Every time she passed near me she screamed with laughter, stumbling and nearly falling into the furrows; then she would show off like a child, tossing the plough as if it were a toy, and shouting in a rough voice, "Hi, mule! Move, I say, move!"

But if the help I had from my maid was of the ruder sort, that of my three brothers was most gentle and effective. Bud, when he finished the two rooms he had added to our house, went to putting up shelves, making me a wardrobe, sealing my room afresh with yellow pine. Lilbud attended the garden faithfully, and flattered me not a little by the manner in which he would consult my ignorance about the crops. Archer was with me nearly constantly. My own work about the house became a triumphal progress, I was relieved at every turn of lifting, carrying, reaching. Their devoted attitude of service abated not a whit as we all grew in intimacy. As for me, I daily increased in my content. All that I had expected to find hard was proving easy. For the first time since my unthinking childhood I felt a trust in life, a confidence in the future.

There was, however, one cloud on my horizon. When Virgie Fanton came to see me she invariably noticed Bud and talked to him, and he, poor fellow, did not know how to take such notice with indifference. This was no mere

elation that he was not ignored as a "poor-white," for Bud, alas, never dreamed of any condescension. He held Virgie in high reverence because she was a charming woman, not because she was mistress of The Terraces; just as his attitude toward the master of Caxton was one of cordial and unenvying admiration of his "manners." To Bud, good manners were the highest human achievement. He very justly prided himself on his own; with the rich, poor, high and low, white and colored, Bud was courteous. He valued first and foremost courtesy in others. Thus when Virgie would prettily defer to his opinion, when she thanked him for this or that slight service, most of all when she gracefully asked a favor of him, Bud was openly delighted. I often wished for the time when Virgie should be married and have done with all her coquetries; but though there were constant allusions to her engagement, there was never a hint as to when she meant to end it. Meanwhile it was well known that Colonel Fanton was urging the marriage on his daughter, and Mr. Peyton-Call publicly avowed his impatience with suitable airs of melancholy.

My cloud grew a little larger when Colonel Fanton—of course by Virgie's wish—gave my brother the work of training his colts. Now Bud was a great deal at The Terraces, where he often ate at the family table; for only negroes are

supposed to belong to the serving class in that region, and the white well-digger or carpenter, or whatsoever he be, is received like a guest. Bud had a great deal to say about Miss Virgie in those days, about her beauty and sweetness, and her spirit in assisting him with the training of the colts.

"She ain't as much afraid as most strong men," he would say, admiringly. "I get most crazy for fear she'll get hurt or thrown sometimes; but she can outride me, I reckon."

"I should think you would object," I suggested to Mr. Peyton-Call, who was lounging on our steps one sunny morning, "to all this wild riding on the part of Virgie."

"Who am I?" he inquired, humbly.

"You are the man she has honored by electing to take care of her," I answered.

He smiled vaguely.

"I am hoping she will take care of me," he returned. "I wish I were an untamed colt. I might get some part of her attention then. But I am too tame, too docile, too old and steady to interest Virgie."

"You are perhaps too languid," I said, with reproof.

"What should I do?" he inquired. "In all this world full of work there is nothing for the owner of Caxton but to sit still and await the coming of the sheriff."

He often referred in light tone to his poverty, hinted at his debts; and I saw him too plainly in the pitiable position of one who was waiting for a rich marriage to pull him out of his difficulties.

With the first money Bud received from Colonel Fanton for his work with the colts he rode to New Rome and bought new clothes for himself and his brothers. He declared they had been dressing "little better than poor-whites," and it was due me that they should all make a better appearance. The clothes he had sent down by a lumber-team; but himself brought all the way on horseback the present he had bought for me. This was a porcelain vase, "hand-painted" with pink and green roses, and plentifully gilded.

"I didn't know just what you would like, sister," he said, beamingly. "I couldn't bring you clothes because you've got more pretty things than there are in town; but I recollected how you took that old stone butter-jar to put flowers in, and I reckoned this would just about suit you."

I found myself unaccountably mingling tears and laughter as I thanked him; and the uncouth thing was glorified by association, and had a place of honor in our sitting-room.

"That looks more like it belonged to The Terraces than here," was Virgie's comment the

first time her eyes fell on the "ornament." In truth, it was a just observation; stately as Colonel Fanton's house appeared outside, its furnishings did not bear out the impression that it was the home of the best people. The furniture at The Terraces was showy and inelegant, and the carpets of hideous patterns. It was only a great bareness and cleanliness that saved the room from being altogether depressing. There were the long-suffered wax lilies under the glass globe, and family crayons —even Virgie's youthful beauty had not been spared—and vases like the one Bud had bought me in New Rome.

"The Terraces are furnished in a mighty tacky way," Virgie declared. "Papa bought everything. Mamma never bought anything. The Calls objected to Mamma's marriage, do you know, Cassandra? I reckon it was because they didn't like papa's taste in wall-paper. I don't like it, either; I'm a Call in that way; and if I ever marry Donald it'll be because I want to live in beautiful old Caxton. That house is full of handsome furniture and old pictures, and there's china and there are stamped leather chairs. I fell in love with it all when I was a child, and used to go to play with Don's cousins, who lived there."

"Not with him?"

"Not much; he never was there, except for

his vacations, and he was right wild and shy. I wants was, for a fact! Don's sassy ways are Yankee."

"Oh, come, Virgie——!"

"Cassy, I declare it's so; he never was like he is now till after he'd stayed with his Boston cousins when he was most grown. He despised them because they had been mean to his mother, and they couldn't bear him because he was so much like her; and he got his practice in being sassy right there."

"Where did you get your practice?" I inquired. "You can't lay that to the Yankees."

"Learned it from Don," she returned, promptly, "just where I learned all my badness. He used to get me to run away from my governess when I was little, and he taught me to flirt when I grew bigger. We always have been sweethearts, you know. They arranged that for us, I reckon, when I was a baby. The first thing I remember they used to point out that scrawny, long-legged, red-haired boy, and say to me, 'There's your little sweetheart, don't you want to give him a pretty kiss?' And then Don would come up and kiss me, dutifully, and when they weren't looking he'd pinch me. He always was mighty mean, and he's mean yet."

"Virgie, if you can't say pleasant things about your friend, you can at least keep quiet," I suggested, trying not to laugh.

first. I can't remember a single pleasant thing, except that he used to bring me all the sweet-gum I could chew," she said, with affected thoughtfulness; "but don't think I'm not perfectly devoted to Don," she added, hastily, "because I am, and so is papa. And I get right outdone when other people criticise him, because I know what a hard time he's had. They brought him up in expensive schools, where he learned to need all sorts of luxuries, and then they turned over this waste of land to him, and this mass of debts, and this great old house to take care of; and he's spent all his time since he finished college in fighting through the lawsuits his uncles started for him; and courting me besides—a right unprofitable life, wasn't it?"

"When you are married—" I began. She made a little gesture of impatience.

"I'll marry when I am old and not afraid of ghosts," she cried, with a laugh. "I can't go to Caxton yet awhile. Cousin Lucia dances there on moonlit nights, the darkies say; and as she hated my mother, so she will hate me; and I'm afraid of her."

"Really, Virgie, this is ghastly," I protested.

"Don't you believe in ghosts, Cassy? I do. People like Aunt Lucia and myself, who are full of the love of life—worldly life—they always come back and haunt. I know Aunt Lucia

wants her ball-gown back from me, and wants to give that receipt to papa. If I were dead I would try to get back and make you-all do what I wanted. You watch out when I am dead, Cassandra."

"Virgie, you are not very pleasant to-day," I complained. "I wish you hadn't come."

Whereupon she embraced me and called me her honey-sweetness and her pudd'n'-pie, and declared that she would never, never haunt me so long as I behaved myself.

"And I'll marry Don and open Caxton and lay Aunt Lucia's ghost as soon as you command it," she added, fantastically. "As soon as you, wise Cassy, say it's time for all my fun to cease and all my troubles to begin, I'll marry Donald."

Bud was away from home for several weeks, having received from a cousin of Mr. Peyton-Call's in the adjoining county of Lennox, an order to train a pair of carriage horses. We missed him sorely; we looked joyously for his return. The first words when he came back were to ask me about Virgie. Before he inquired as to how we had prospered ourselves, he wanted to hear how Miss Virgie did. There was no longer any doubt the thoughtless girl had gone too far. Bud's heart was ensnared. I answered him as serenely as I might.

"Miss Virgie is well and gay. She and Mr.

Peyton-Call are riding a great deal together now. I see them almost every day."

"They've been ridin' together, have they?" said Bud, thoughtfully. "Have they talked any about gettin' married, do you know, Sister?" he added, in a low voice.

"Of course, they do, Bud, when they are alone together," I returned, gently. "I suppose as soon as he's a little out of debt— Of course, Miss Virgie wants to marry her chosen sweetheart as soon as she can."

"Yes, I reckon she does," said poor Bud, slowly. "And Mr. Don certainly is a nice man; but he ain't good enough for her. There ain't anybody good enough for her."

"She'll improve him wonderfully," said I. "When once his great house is open again he'll feel his pride returning, and he'll become more of a man."

"Oh, he's man enough," said Bud, with surprise; "but it ain't in nature for any man to be good enough for her."

I tried to turn his thoughts.

"See all we have been doing, Bud, to make our home more cosey," I coaxed, taking his arm; and he let me lead him around, and he was his warm-hearted and appreciative self; but the gloom in his eyes was enough to wring my heart.

For a few weeks I watched Bud almost

hourly. He stayed at home a great deal; occupied himself with carpentry work, and helped Lilbud on the farm. Not even his gun and fishing-rod would lure him away from me. The pleasure of his day was to be near me and to talk. In spite of my anxiety they were happy days for me. If Bud was nursing a wounded heart he was doing it in a patient and manly way enough. He liked to talk of Miss Virgie, but he showed no aversion to talking also of Mr. Don. I drew my own conclusions, and though I knew Bud was sore in love, I was equally sure that he was not mad enough to foster the faintest hope. Again and again I considered the fact that Virgie was betrothed with thankfulness. If it had not been for that, no consideration of the real gulf that separated him from the lady of The Terraces would have counted with my dreamy and illusionary brother. He felt himself good enough for anyone in the world. That he was poor was no social bar; he admitted that he himself had no education, but there were other members of his family highly educated. He had merely had the disadvantage of having raised himself.

Now that by my thought and care and the little money I thought well to spend, our place was taking on an air of prosperity and even of quaint charm, Bud was more of the gentleman

than ever. His new clothes became him mightily. He had an inherent sense of what was appropriate and never went through the awful black-suit stage of the rehabited rustic. He imitated the easy, sportsmanlike dress of our landlord, his model in all things, and, as he himself expressed it, "cut a dash" from the first. For my own part, I saw very well what was Virgie's temptation to extend her campaign against the hearts of men even as far as my handsome brother. There was more zest of romance in it than with the general run of her admirers. Angry as I was at times over her heartlessness, I often scarcely blamed her. She had been raised to consider coquetry her steady occupation; and her betrothed, who could so easily have fascinated her himself, showed a languid indifference as to her mode of amusement.

Our house had become a much-visited place by our acquaintances. Dr. von Baerensprung delighted in us, and delighted us. He brought Archer work to do and stayed to teach him; he talked to Lilbud by the hour; he liked to share our simple meals. Virgie, whether going or coming to and from the court-house would "stop by," as she called it. Mr. Peyton-Call came often as her escort and, oftener than I liked, alone. It was not that I laid any weight on the fact that, while he asked for Bud,

he usually wanted to talk to me. But as things went in Rolfe, where life is taken on a few and simple principles, I thought Peyton-Call's attention to me might attract the wrong kind of notice. It was bad enough that Virgie should take her betrothal with apparent lightness. Aside from this consideration I felt a certain menace to my own quiet in the company. Peyton-Call drew me back, whether I would or not, to the world I had deliberately foregone; he liked to throw a light of comedy upon my coming home to be a Dale. When he entered with his well-bred air among my dear, rough brothers and engaged me in conversations they could only half follow, he seemed to be denying my place and with subtle impudence arrogating me to his own world. It seemed right to show him I was not in Rolfe for any part of his amusement.

I became, therefore, cold as snow toward Mr. Peyton-Call and in speaking of him to others. Bud reproached me for not being more gracious, Virgie expressed naïve surprise that I should dislike a man whom everyone else found charming, and Dr. von Baerensprung, now and then, put himself out to defend his favorite, Caxton.

"Is it nothing to a man's credit, then, that he maintains some of the charm and dignity of life in the face of an adverse fortune?" he demanded at Mrs. Baumann's Kaffeetisch, where

I had assented to one of our host's sweeping condemnations of Peyton-Call.

"You are incorrigible, Dr. Max, with your preference for what is strictly ornamental," cried Mr. Baumann.

"My friend Peyton-Call could not be better characterized," returned Dr. von Baerensprung with animation. "But your logic, Wilhelm, is faulty; one does not prefer the ornamental, things become ornamental because we prefer them. This gentleman, to give him Bud's highest praise, has excellent manners; he is a product of good society. He can talk with anyone on any subject with unruffled calm; he can oppose you, Wilhelm, in your heat and indignation with perfect sweetness of tone. He is not only well-poised, he is clever, and will satirize himself and his county with excellent humor. He has lived for years with his intellectual and perhaps social inferiors, and maintained his polish without acquiring a disdain. Getting poorer day by day, more and more bound up in lawsuits, doggedly sticking to his house and property, instead of letting everything slide to go North, where his education and talents could have counted—I say the man has a most interesting personality."

"Come you with your personalities!" cried Mr. Baumann, thumping the table indignantly; "I say, where is his character? Is it virtuous

next to be in debt, and noble to be lazy? If he has neither taken up the battle of life in the North, with the aid of his talents, nor yet adopted the only means of subsistence here——"

"Would you have a man of his stamp plough and harrow?" demanded Dr. von Baerensprung.

"Why not?" I put in.

"You have nothing to say here, you are an Arcadian, Miss Cassandra," said Dr. von Baerensprung, laughing at me. "You picture life in blank verse, shepherds with pipes, rural leisure, and the beauties of harvest-home. But this poor fellow knows the hardships of life at first-hand. He knows that to make himself a plough-boy would be to destroy in himself all that inheritance of taste and intellect. He is the last of the Peyton-Calls, a rich, proud, and cultivated family, if their house speaks true of them; he had better starve to death among his books—yes, he reads, my dear Wilhelm, quite as much as you do, though he does not parade science and philosophy—than to live by the toil of his untrained hands."

"But he has had the choice, surely, of vegetating here in Rolfe or of adopting some profession," I insisted. "Did they not tell me his Boston relatives have educated him? And hasn't he antagonized them by returning to

Rolfe to lead a perfectly idle and even dissipated life?"

"Pooh! dissipated!" cried Caxton's defender. "What do those Puritans know about the customary amenities of life of the Southerner? I have drunk wine and played with the man, and I say he is a gentleman. Of course, he gambles; so do I. There is no fun in cards without stakes. And here, where drunkenness is a matter of easy joking, fancy, if you can, a man of Peyton-Call's humor posing as an advocate of temperance."

"And his opposition to every public improvement!" asked Mr. Baumann.

"He represents his county," said Dr. von Baerensprung, genially. "They are conservative here. They want to be let alone. I have come to have great sympathy for their point of view. The people of Rolfe instinctively feel that they have a rare possession for these modern times, a corner of the earth yet uninvaded by Enterprise, snapping her whips. The people of Rolfe are gay, wholly absorbed in hunting and love-making. You are a thorn in their side with your progress, Wilhelm, and I was another with my reforestration sermon, until I gave it up and joined their picnics—and were Miss Cassandra not young and beautiful, she would be the worst of all. You two are bound to go on with your work, I suppose. You

can't withdraw as I do; but you should mercifully judge the people you have come to harass."

"If my brothers heard you say I had come to harass them, you would have three duels on your hands, Freiherr von Baerensprung," I exclaimed, wrathfully; and he laughed so heartily we had to all join in.

Certainly, except in the one matter of having given Bud the chance to lose his heart to Virgie, my coming to Rolfe appeared as the summer weeks flew by to have been more and more beneficent. Lilbud gave me cordial credit for the improvement in the farm, Archer showed himself warmly appreciative of the help I had given him directly and the indirect help I had brought him through Dr. von Baerensprung's interest, and Bud was constant in his praise of me and my ways about the house. If I was bold in my first advance to break down the shiftless and slovenly habits of their bachelor housekeeping, I had yet been inwardly afraid of venturing too far. Now I felt my place assured I clothed myself in authority, and my word became law with all three. I had unaccountably laid a charm on these warm-hearted boys. They looked for my smile as if I were a sort of queen, I could reward them with my mere presence and the display of a pretty dress.

And how I grew to love them! At first Bud's beauty and his gentleness had alone absorbed me, and I had underestimated the younger two. Now I found myself intent upon their faces also, watching for the signs of pain or of pleasure, of weariness, and of content. With each of them I tied a personal knot of friendship as the time developed. Bud and I talked of most intimate and serious things together, of our past, exchanging views on life, moralizing on character, telling each the other his religion and his philosophy.

With Lilbud, who was so much shyer and so much less emotional, I dealt almost wholly of practical things: the farm, the animals, the cost of this and that filled our discussions. Whether I should not do more of the housework alone, and let Pearl work in the field, or whether we should hire help for him; whether it was worth while to establish our own smoke-house, and kill hogs in the fall, or whether to rely for our meat wholly on what the boys would shoot; whether the fact that Lee sucked eggs was to be broken to Bud, or whether we should try to cure this fault without exposing the dog; such questions and a hundred like them came up day by day. At sundown he and I would stroll along the margin of a field together, or perch on the fence of the lot, planning and scheming for the welfare of our house,

I began to find Lilbud less slow and stupid than I had thought him, and he pretended that I was more practical than most men he had known. Thus with increasing mutual respect we labored toward the same ends.

With Archer I had the most absorbing relation of all, for the boy, wonderfully stimulated by his contact with Dr. von Baerensprung, was already intellectually awake. It had occurred to him that I too had seen the great world outside of Rolfe, and his curiosity was rife to question me. He wanted to know about the great city of New York, about how people talked and did, and what they believed in. He heard about the theatres with the keenest delight of all, and wanted me to describe by the hour together the plays I had seen. There was fostered a lively desire to get out of Rolfe, and see the world in Archer; I knew it, and was glad of it, for he certainly was too bright and young and strong to stick by the old and refuse the new like the rest of Rolfe.

I loved them so dearly, was so absorbed in our life together, that I almost begrudged the time that Virgie claimed of me. Her cordiality would have me at The Terraces to spend the day, or she must have me drive with her, or else she would come to my house and while away hours watching me or helping me at my work. If Bud chanced upon us on any such

occasion he was wounded beyond words that this peerless little personage should stoop to labor. He would declare boldly that, though his sister was incorrigible in the matter of spoiling that no-'count nigger, Pearl, that was no reason why Miss Virgie should put her hand to work. Once he coolly lifted the panful of dishes from under our noses, seized upon our whole supply of towels, carried the whole thing out to the chopping-block in the yard, and finished the washing and drying himself, while we watched him from the back door with peals of laughter. With great composure he ranged the dishes on the top of a pile of cord-wood as he dried them. Virgie declared he was certainly a sweet fellow, and I agreed with her.

So the long summer went serenely by. We had a scorching drought, we had a time of insufferable heat; we had the season of long rains when we learned something of the condition of our shingled roof; and we had our wind-storms that broke down the grain; but whatever the weather out-of-doors, that serene atmosphere of content in which we had fallen was not disturbed. When summer drew to its close, however, events began to fall like ripened fruits, and soon there were changes in our outward world which threatened to drive us from the even tenor we had so far kept.

CHAPTER XI

MR. PEYTON-CALL IS QUIET

IT was in the first hazy days of autumn when the hopes of the fields had been fulfilled; we had been garnering and talked of the coming winter; it seemed the acme of our domestic peace; when the first blow fell of all that long attack upon our fortunes. Virgie came riding up to coax me out into the woods with her to gather sloes. She was recklessly gay that morning and kept me laughing while she talked. I had no time to frolic with her; she sat in my store-room window and made her observations on the best way to lead a merry life, while I put my pantry shelves to rights.

"You, sweet Cassy, don't know a thing in the world about having a good time," she said. "You stick at home, you keep a curious little frown between your eyes trying to remember little things. It'll soon be time for the hunting to begin and you won't take the least interest in it."

"What have I to do with fox-hunting!" said I. "In a week I open school."

"Nothing in the world but foolishness!" cried Virgie. "The idea of putting your

youth and energy into a losing game like that! You've missed the point of Rolfe entirely, Cassy, if you think it's worth while for the future inhabitants of the county to know how to read and write. Those of this generation that have learned it are doing our best to forget it; I never read anything but fashion journals, I declare I don't. And papa reads the New Rome paper; and if neither of us could read I'd make my dresses just as prettily by going to New Rome oftener to see how they dress there, and papa would get just as much news talking to people at the court-house. It's all foolishness to learn to read. Your brother Archer isn't half as nice as your brother Bud, with all his books and serious expression. Don't be a school-teacher, Cassy, stop work and play with me."

"I'll play with you on Saturday," I said, laughing at her little pout; and I stepped up to take her fair little face between my hands.

"Cassy, you are the loveliest and sweetest—" she murmured, looking up into my eyes, and I was surprised to see tears in her own. "Cassy, why can't I have you with me every minute? You love me a little—and at The Terraces no one cares for me."

I was amazed at this soft tone from Virgie, amazed to hear a complaint from the self-reliant girl.

"What's the trouble, honey?" I asked her softly, putting my arms around her.

"Papa is furious with me and thunders reproaches; Cousin Lucy is frozen stiff and won't speak to me; only Mammy stands by me, and there's no living at The Terraces," she exclaimed bitterly, and her tears ran faster.

"Good heavens, Virgie, what have you done?" I demanded, impatiently, giving her a little shake.

"Nothing at all," she cried, indignantly, wiping her eyes. "My own affair! I've only broken my engagement to Donald. I declare I'll never get engaged again as long as I live if they make all this fuss about breaking it off."

My arms sank to my sides, I was so lamed by the shock, and I looked at the girl with mingled consternation and incredulity. In the pause between us we heard the voice of Bud trolling a negro revival hymn in mellow tones as he crossed the yard outside the pantry window. A pleased look came into Virgie's eyes.

"Mr. Dale certainly can sing!" she exclaimed, bending her head to listen.

I turned to my jars and boxes again and mechanically continued to range them. Bud's song died away as he reached the stable, and for a long while neither Virgie nor I said a word. She leaned her pretty head on her hand and looked dreamily out across the gold-

en stubble-field to the haze and the sky; every time I glanced at her the sweetness of her curving mouth and the tender droop of her eyes reassured me of the Virgie I had learned to trust; every time I looked away and thought over her words my heart sank in misgiving.

"This is the longest I have ever kept quiet in my life," she exclaimed suddenly and with a laugh. "I must be getting serious."

"I hope you are," I answered, gravely. "Or is it really a light matter with you, Virgie, to break faith with a man?"

"Cassy, if you are going to talk like Page Whittaker, who prays for me every night she goes to bed, and calls me unregenerate to my face, I'm going to go home to jump into the river off the lowest terrace," she returned, impatiently. "I won't be preached to about this sort of thing. If I thought it my moral duty to marry all the men I have found amusing at different times, I'd be a regular Bluebeard."

And with this extraordinary bit of defiance she swung herself about in the casement and sprang to the ground outside.

"Mr. Dale," she called, in her sweet high voice. "Oh, Mr. Dale!"

Bud hastened from the barn at her summons. His color heightened with pleasure merely to have her call his name.

"I'm going home now," she announced.

"Cassy isn't a bit sweet this morning. Will you bring me my horse?"

"Why, sister!" exclaimed Bud, with awful reproach, looking up to where I stood sadly in the window.

"Virgie, forgive me and come back," I said, with a recollection of her tears of a few minutes before. "I have so much to talk to you about. Stay with me all day, Virgie; I want you."

"Well, I will," she said, readily, and then to Bud: "You can mount me to the window again, Mr. Dale."

She held out her pretty foot, he put his hand under it and lifted her lightly to her former perch. Now she put her arm about my neck and kissed me heartily.

"I love, love, love you," she whispered. "And I'll never be good, no, not even for you."

"I know you won't be good," I returned. "But, Virgie, you will be kind." And as Bud left us again I continued, with a little tremor in my voice, "Confine your flirting, Virgie, to men like Mr. Peyton-Call, who are your match and can take care of themselves."

"I know exactly what you mean," she returned in her singing voice, hanging in my arms and looking up at me with half-closed eyes; "and I say you are a silly and suspicious old thing, and not good company for me be-

cause you put things in my head I never thought of!"

"Virgie, don't pretend to me," I said, severely. "I love you dearly, little girl, but I know your mischief to the core. Understand, if we are to be friends you must behave yourself."

"Anything you want I'll do except to marry Donald," she answered with animation, sitting up to arrange her hair. "I certainly am tired of his superior airs. He won't worship me; he will see my faults. And all his pretence of devotion is unendurable. I say, a man must know his place. Don reads too much. Cassandra, it seems to me Don would suit you better than he does me. You are equal to sassing him back when he gets too superior."

"If I could ever compete with you in what you call 'sass,'" I returned, angrily, "I would one day give you a piece of my mind, Virgie Fanton."

"Oh, you are beautiful," she cried, delightedly. "Storm away, Cassy; it's the rarest thing in the world that I can get a rise out of you."

I walked out of the store-room and she came after me.

"Now let's go and gather sloes," she coaxed. "I simply must celebrate. Cassy, I feel so happy and so free. If they wouldn't act so

unreasonable at home about it, I would be the happiest girl in the world."

"Virgie, you are incomprehensible," I exclaimed. "It is to be assumed that you have hurt Mr. Peyton-Call beyond——"

"Yes, we must assume all that sort of thing," she broke in coolly. "It belongs to the dignities of life which Donald never neglects. He was suitably pale and grave the other night; he said the right thing about caring more for my happiness than for his own; he has suitably carried his broken heart out of the county, and won't be back for a month, I reckon. He'll receive the consolation of his intimates with suitable melancholy; but, Cassy, I'm just fond enough of my cousin to be glad that he feels the same relief as I do, in the bottom of his heart. I've a right to show it, and he's bound to conceal it as a crime; but it's there. Sometime, when we are good friends again, I'm going to have a frank talk with Donald Peyton-Call; and then I'll tell you what he says about this time of his suffering."

And she held me with her clear brown eyes as she spoke half playfully, half seriously. I seemed to look to the bottom of her heart and to see it free from guile.

That night I saw by Bud's face when he returned from the court-house that he had heard the news of the broken engagement. He ap-

peared to be in a sort of maze of dreams. He could scarcely bring his mind to answer us when we asked him a question. Archer ventured the opinion that Bud had been drinking; for once I should have been glad to have accepted that as an explanation of Bud's stupor. Alas, it was only too evident that what he had heard had changed the face of the world to Bud.

It was moonlight, and after supper he put his arm about me and drew me out into the yard, where we paced backward and forward, now under the dark oaks, now in the silvery light.

"Sister, talk to me," he said, gently.

"What shall I talk about?" I asked him, sadly. "My heart is full of trouble, Bud. Virgie has told me to-day—you know. I am very unhappy. I think I can't talk about it."

"Why does it make you unhappy?" demanded Bud.

"Because I love her—and I see that she is going on and on, Bud, to make men unhappy, to break their hearts; and she is too cold-hearted herself to care or to know what she is doing."

"Sister, it looks to me like you don't know Miss Virgie a little bit," he returned, dreamily; and that was all the reply he vouchsafed to my long accusation. "But I can't bear to think of Mr. Don," he added in a lower voice. "I

don't know what he will do. I reckon, Sister, he'll shoot himself. I would if I were in his place."

"Well, Bud, most men who come near her get into something like his place sooner or later," I returned with some sternness. "They don't shoot themselves. They see that their suffering is their own fault. They are mostly warned beforehand that she will play with them. And they bear it with what pluck is in them."

To which he deigned no reply whatever. For the first time since our reunion Bud and I were of two minds, and he independent of me.

As Virgie had prophesied, Peyton-Call left Rolfe for nearly a month. We understood he was with his cousins, the Calls of Carrfield. They reported him broken-hearted, but resigned and quiet; Virgie smiled a little scepti-cally when she heard this through the gossips. It was, perhaps, the general impression that Mr. Don would be able to live down his dis-appointment; Bud alone spoke now and then of our absent landlord in an awed tone, as of one departed from this life. Good, great-hearted Bud! He had no moment of joy over the fall of his powerful rival. His pity turned his former admiration into loyal affection. He declared he found it lonely in Rolfe without Mr. Don.

There was another man in Rolfe who, be-

fore many weeks had passed, expressed himself anxious for Peyton-Call's return. Mr. Baumann had been writing to him in Carrfield on business and had received no reply. Now he looked forward to a personal meeting. It concerned nothing less than the buying of the mill-site. Mr. Baumann, it appeared, had been interesting himself seriously in the scheme for restoring the water-power even while its author, Dr. von Baerensprung, was coming to the conclusion that Rolfe was well enough left alone. As soon as the news had spread that Colonel Fanton's daughter would not marry the master of Caxton, the enterprising German took the first steps in acting for his own interest. While Peyton-Call was still away, Mr. Baumann made Colonel Fanton an offer for the headwater tract, bare of timber. There was some bargaining and some delay; but it was understood that Colonel Fanton was quite willing to sell the land from which he had long ago reaped the last profit.

I heard of this business now and then, when my brothers brought news from the Court-house or as Dr. von Baerensprung spoke of it. There befell, however, an event of such importance to our family that I lost sight, for a time, of the affairs of my friends.

CHAPTER XII

THE SOCIAL LEVEL OF THE DALES

"YOU don't know Lilbud," said my eldest brother, "he's an oyster. A terrapin will let go when it thunders, but nothing will make Lilbud open his mouth till he gets ready."

Bud had called for me at the school, and we were walking home together under the falling yellow leaves of the forest. It was not far between our cabin and the little log-house of the Caxton school; but I never went alone. Archer was my usual escort, but I had faithlessly left him to-day to finish putting sums upon the board for the pleasure of walking with my handsome elder brother. And now I found him so glum and preoccupied over the affairs of Lilbud that I was uneasy myself.

"If he won't tell us what he is about, we must wait," said I.

"I reckon it's right serious," said Bud, laying about him nervously with his switch. "I've a notion of what he is doing."

"Not cards!" I cried, in dismay.

"Worse than cards," said Bud, gloomily.

"Oh, Bud! you know he doesn't drink," I protested.

"Worse than drink," said Bud. "I've seen Lilbud do like this one time before. He's fixin' to get married."

I received this intimation in awed silence. There was no explanation necessary between us. We both knew well enough what Lilbud's marriage might mean for us. If Bud's surmise was correct there was only one question—how bad was it to be?

"But you say he went off like this before, and it came to nothing," I suggested.

"Things were different. We weren't so prosperous. I reckon nobody would have him a year ago. Now there's no hope for that. Any poor-white girl in the county would have him—if he happened to strike her fancy."

Bud smiled a little at the notion that his brother could strike any girl's fancy; then he grew grave again.

"What gets me is this: the boy has a right to marry if he wants to. He's worked like a nigger, and blamed if between you and him the rent ain't going to be paid—and I reckon Mr. Don'll faint when he gets it, or else kill himself laughing, one."

"Yes, Lilbud has the right to marry," I said, dejectedly.

"And there's no use pretending he's any too

good for one of these girls that he's likely to pick out—say Siggy Dwight, old man Dickerson's granddaughter."

"Do you think it is she?" I asked in alarm, remembering the dowdish, plump, and putty-faced damsel I had seen in church.

"I don't know any more about it than you do, Sister. I'm just supposing a case. She's about Lilbud's style—and I say he ain't too good for her. Lilbud, he ain't got any more style about him than a starved crow; you've a heap, Sister, and I have some, and Son, he's improving every day; but 'tain't any use dressing Lilbud in good clothes. Let him swap with Mr. Don to-day, and there'd be just the same difference between them that there always was."

I was very unhappy now, and from mingled causes. It was not only the just dread of being brought in contact with a low-bred woman; I felt that Bud had lost some dignity by the attitude he took and I in supporting it. Who were we to throw up our hands in horror at an alliance with the poor-white family of Dickerson? Tears of shame came to my eyes. Was it I who was making a snob of Bud?

"You don't reckon we could break him up?" he asked, doubtfully, when I was silent.

"Do we want to, Bud? You said yourself he has a right to be happy."

"How about our rights?" demanded poor Bud. "Won't it spoil everything? Do you reckon Miss Virgie will drop in to breakfast like she did this morning, or that Mr. Don will stop by so often if there's a Mrs. Dale in the house that hasn't any manners?"

"Do we care more for the company of these strangers than we do for our own brother?" I asked.

"I declare, Sister, do you call Miss Virgie a stranger?" he cried, in amazement. "You certainly make out like you were mighty fond of her."

"But she is not like a member of the family, Bud," I answered, gently. "We must think of the family first. If any of our connections don't seem good enough for her to sit at table with—and we know it might easily happen, Bud——"

The poor boy was growing scarlet under his bronzed skin; and he it was who, before I had come with my train of fine acquaintances, had never had a doubt in the world as to his social position. He had been as good as anybody, no more to be patronized than an Indian chief. Now he was in the pitiable position of fuming over his brother's possible marriage with one who would crush his social aspiration.

"And as for Mr. Peyton-Call's visits, Brother, you must know," I continued, very gently,

"that if it had not been for Virgie's fancy for me, we should never have seen her betrothed at our house. Do you know that the Calls were so proud they would not associate with Colonel Fanton at one time, rich as he was; and were angry with Virgie's mother for marrying him? Such people as that will never look upon Hank Dale's children but as inferiors. But we can have our own pride, Bud, and keep to our own people if it comes to a choice. Let us leave Lilbud alone, and welcome the wife he chooses."

Bud turned on me with flashing eyes, and seized both my hands. For a moment we stood so in the yellow light of the autumn woods in the heart of our glen, silently looking at each other. I smiled up in his face.

"If anybody says my sister isn't the finest lady of the land I'll shoot him for a liar," said Bud, in low tones. "You're all wrong, Cassy, in what you say. You don't know about this country down here where everybody is white or nigger, one; and where it ain't money but manners that count. But you can't help a few Yankee notions, Cassy, and I won't be hard on them. And it's all right about Lilbud; whoever he brings home, we'll make a lady of her, too."

Four days later, in the golden afternoon, when I was alone except for Pearl in the

kitchen, I heard Lilbud returning with the horse and wagon and resolved to question him as to where he had spent the day. Presently he appeared in the doorway of the sitting-room and beside him a small, slight figure in white, a mere slip of a girl. He pushed her slightly forward with a gentle movement.

"Sister," he said, simply, "this is Lena, my wife."

For an instant I was horror-struck, and then that feeling passed in a wave of pity. This was a child, a real child, and poor Lilbud standing there with a strange glow on his face appeared as nothing more. So, feeling old as any mother, I rose and went to meet the little thing.

"I am glad to see you, Lena," I said, quietly, for I had a dread of frightening her, and very gently I took her hand. "How do you do?" and I kissed her.

"I'm very well, I thank you, ma'am; how are you?" replied the poor thing in a timid voice, her eyes roaming about the floor. Her face was peaked and delicate, sadly overcome by a cheap and gaudy hat. She was dressed in a nun's-veiling gown of gawky cut, crudely trimmed with pink silk. It was not even full length, and her light hair was braided and tied in the neck with ribbon in the style of a half-grown girl. On her hands were cotton mits.

"Have you come far to-day?" I asked, as I contemplated her.

"Clean over from Sunderland," Lilbud answered for her. "Mr. Duke Freedland, he's her father. We were married to-day."

"I wish you had asked me to the marriage," I said to him. He looked uncomfortable, and made no reply.

"Come into my room, Lena, to take off your hat and to rest," I said to her. "You must be tired."

She suffered herself to be led by the hand across the hall. Lilbud's head turned after her as though his sun were setting.

In the other room I removed her hat and smoothed her hair with my hand.

"Child, how old are you?"

"Fourteen last July."

"Isn't it strange that I should know so little about you? You don't mind my asking you a good many questions?"

"No'm."

It was such a plaintive, timid little voice!

"Have you a mother, Lena?"

"Yes'm."

"And older sisters?"

"Yes'm. Three."

"Did they want you to marry Lilbud?"

"Yes'm." Then after a pause she volunteered: "Pap didn't. He 'lowed I was too young."

"Well, you are rather young, aren't you?" I asked, smiling sadly.

"No'm, I don't think so." (This with unexpected spirit.)

"Are your sisters married?" I queried further.

"Two of them ain't; but Mr. Dale wouldn't have nary one of them."

"He just wanted you?"

"Yes'm."

"Don't call me *ma'am*, Lena! I am your sister now, you know."

"Yes'm, I know."

She had the courage now to raise her eyes to my face. They were pretty eyes, gray and soft and quiet.

Now Lilbud knocked at the door.

"Ain't you most ready to come out?" he called, with unwonted impatience. I bade him enter. The little one gave her husband a swift, shy look and dropped her eyes once more to the floor.

"Don't you want to go about with Brother and see the house and place?" I asked her, and she assented timidly.

They left me, closing the door behind them. I sank down to think it over; but first tears, then helpless laughter, then a hysterical mingling of both assailed me. Finally I sank into a moody revery. My relation to my home appeared suddenly grotesque and impossible.

Was I really called upon by virtue of my self-elected place to play mother to this waif? And then came the thought of Virgie and with it a certain strength. Surely the alliance with Lena would forever root the Dales to their own social level. The illusory sense of equality which was so dangerous to my brother's peace must drop away; for I did not share Bud's hopes that we could "make a lady" of her.

I was roused from my thoughts by the sound of laughter—soft, rippling, sweet as the call of a bird. Lena was already at home.

. . . . . .

Bud's reception of our sister-in-law was another manifestation of the sweetness of his nature. He was too thoroughly kind to show his dismay by word or look; yet he regarded the marriage as a disaster.

"What's done is done," he said to me when we were alone, "but oh, sister! ain't she poh-white?"—and we shook our heads and declared that she certainly was. I was presently surprised to learn that what was my chief concern, Lena's extreme youth, did not impress him.

"I recollect Pap's saying our mother w'a'n't but fifteen or sixteen," he remarked. "I don't see nothing to worry about in Lena's size. I reckon she's most grown. Every woman don't grow as tall and fine as you, Sis' Cassy."

After that, when I considered the frail little person of my sister-in-law, I thought of our unremembered mother and the pathos of her life, so short, so obscure. For her sake we would cherish this child-wife of our brother's—thus Bud and I earnestly agreed together.

Archer, more taken by surprise than we, showed more ill-feeling over Lilbud's marriage.

"Wasn't that a sneaky way for him to go off?" he demanded wrathfully of me alone. "I wonder what makes him do us that way? It isn't grateful to us, who are trying to raise him up and give him a show in the world."

"It seems to me it is Lilbud who is giving us a show in the world," I replied sternly, for I was greatly dismayed to find that the poison had infected my younger brother also. "Who rents this farm? Who keeps us from being turned out like gypsies or living rent-free on another's land, the object of Mr. Peyton-Call's charity? Whose house is this, where I am allowed to direct and you are given time to study? It is Lilbud's place. He works the farm and rents it and keeps us all!"

Archer was in too much of a temper to be easily shamed, however.

"I know I'm not much 'count yet, but I'm beholding to you, Sister, and not to Lilbud; and now I'm teaching school and working like a nigger for Dr. von Baerensprung every night,

and blamed if I won't be ready to support the whole shooting-match myself before many years. I ain't so triflin' as you make me out; and as for living off Mr. Don, I'd rather shoot myself than thank him for a thing on earth. I despise him. He's laughed at me time and again; and if he's been good to us in the past it's because Bud nor I never took any notice. No one ever told us to pay rent till you came."

He saw I was pained at his angry tone and immediately softened down.

"Sister Cassandra, don't mind me," he begged, putting his arm around my shoulder.

"But if you show yourself proud and hot-tempered and ungrateful, Archer—" I said, reproachfully, secretly pleased at all this display of spirit.

"I'm not ungrateful," he declared defiantly. "But I'll choose myself who shall help me. I'll take everything from you, Sister, and from Dr. von Baerensprung; but not from Mr. Don and not from old man Lilbud. I'll be beholden to my superiors only."

"And Mr. Peyton-Call knows Latin," I said, beginning to laugh. "Isn't that a claim to superiority?"

"Don't tease me," returned the boy, doggedly. "I'll know more than Latin before I die."

And he flung away to his beloved solitude

to pore over his books with a new stimulus in his blood.

In spite of these discussions we were all alike minded to make the best of Lena, and Lilbud could have seen no flaw in our behavior toward her.

I resolutely set myself to gain her confidence and liking. It appeared difficult to give the child the place of matron and not to attempt to extend to her the sway I had over my brothers. She proved a slovenly little piece from the hour that the bridal finery was dropped. With a fine independence, but with disastrous æsthetic effect, she appeared in calico wrapper and curl-papers. I attempted to dazzle her with my own dress. I made her presents from my store wherever I could do so without a hint that her trousseau was incomplete; and I sewed for her by the hour together. But Lena was decidedly inappreciative of what was nice. Bud, who it seemed attracted her liking and respect more easily than I, achieved the first victory in the cause of better dressing. He would follow her about with his beautiful eyes whenever she "looked gallus," as he told her; and when she had not taken the trouble to look gallus, he would turn his head the other way. Her vanity thus aroused, the little chit generally managed to look trimmer in the evening when Bud was

home. As to that, it was not hard for her to make an effective appearance, for she was remarkably pretty, as appeared when the better food than she had ever had at home brought her the glow of health.

Lena naturally took her part in our housekeeping, and here I found I had to assume control. Lilbud remarked to me soon after his marriage that he thought it had been fortunately timed at the opening of the school, as Lena would naturally relieve me of my home duties. She proved, however, such a wasteful and shiftless manager, so ignorant of practical matters, and so innocent of common niceties that I found my cares at home increased instead of diminished by her presence. The raw and helpless immigrant with which the Northern house-keeper must labor gives no more trouble in training; and a family connection with the subject does not seem to simplify the matter. Though Lena was perfectly gentle and non-resisting, she was scarcely docile, for she never accepted my authority as final. I showed her many a time how to serve a meal; but when I was absent things went helter-skelter and untidily. My brothers, who had become mighty fastidious young gentlemen of late, would gently demur. Lilbud advised his wife to mind how Sister Cassandra did things, because she did them right. Whether from

indifference or incapacity, Lena showed no signs of improving.

Another annoyance arose from Pearl's relation to the new lady of the house. That wayward creature professed little respect for Lena, and the latter showed herself sadly lacking in power to impress her. The little mistress took without resentment a good deal of criticism from the maid. With that rank and rapid growth of impertinence which will follow upon any of what Bud called "letting up on a nigger," Pearl was presently insufferable. Bud noticed it at once, called our domestic sharply to account, and threatened discharge if she didn't mind her manners. Then, with the justice that was in him, he took his sister-in-law aside and warned her that if she couldn't make a nigger talk to her white she need not expect to have one to wait on her. I saw no particular effect of his words on Lena. She continued to scream shrilly at Pearl when she wanted something done, and at other times to chat with her with too great familiarity. Pearl was somewhat cowed, however, and between Bud and me was kept in her place.

CHAPTER XIII

ROBERT DALE, OWNER

PEYTON-CALL was at home again, a little languid looking, after his month of grieving, but with his feelings well under control, as usual. He and Virgie seemed to meet without particular embarrassment. She was playing the rôle of being a sister to him in her flighty way.

"Papa will have Don at The Terraces the same as ever, and I must say I should miss him right much if I didn't see him," she told me. "And besides, it's Don who has to get up the fox-hunts, and it would be mighty inconvenient for us not to be friends."

Our landlord thought my sister-in-law charming, he told me, her eyes were so quiet and childlike; and he quoted something about the beauty that had passed into Lena's face from her listening to hidden rivulets. This was a new phase, and I am afraid I did not look greatly impressed.

"I trust Mrs. Dale will receive me," he said, in a melancholy tone; "it will do me good to come under the influence of placid beauty."

Perhaps I betrayed my sceptical amusement

by a faint smile; it is certain I caught a look of mischief in which I had no trouble to recognize the Peyton-Call of the time before his heart was broken.

In these days Bud was much away from the house. On occasions of the fox-hunts he was up and away before we were awake. The meets were at Caxton, and Mr. Peyton-Call, it appeared, could not organize a single hunt without Bud's help. Moreover, my brother's reputation as a horse-trainer was on the rise. He was entrusted in turn with this and that man's hunter to cure of a trick or coax to a higher jump. Thus Bud was usually well mounted, and provided with an excuse for not missing a single hunt. Incident on this amusement there was a great deal of sociability among the men at the court-house and at Caxton. The fall and early winter was the gay season in Rolfe.

Now Bud had always attended the fox-hunts, whether on his Molly mare or another mount. They were in every sense a public amusement in Rolfe, and democratically enjoyed; but I was very well aware that his present relation with the society of Rolfe was entirely new. What with his new style of dress, with the comradeship that Mr. Peyton-Call chose to establish with him, and above all by Virgie's continued favor, Bud had become quite one

with the county gentry. I myself had no part whatever in this social rise of Bud's. Except for my first friendships and acquaintances, I knew no one in Rolfe. I had avoided going to the court-house, even to the store, unwilling to expose myself to curious eyes.

I usually went to the church, for Bud wanted me to accompany him. He never missed a service now, and, I very well knew, never missed a gracious bow and smile from Virgie when she came out. Alas, poor Bud, he shared such smiles with never less than a dozen swains, who looked for them as eagerly as he. As far as I could see, it was as much a part of Rolfe County life for a man to be in love with Virgie Fanton as it was for him to play cards at the court-house at night.

Virgie talked to me after church, introduced people to me, and gave public proof of her intimacy with me. Afterward she would complain of my haughty and reserved manners before her other friends, assure me that they were all dying to know me better, and begging her to bring me out in Rolfe. But I had my own views as to what was wisest, and I confess did not meet anyone halfway. I declined some very cordial invitations, and neglected to return some very pleasant calls. I hoped the good people of Rolfe would overlook me and mine, as they would assuredly have done

except for Virgie's and Mr. Peyton-Call's attentions to us all.

Meanwhile, from his intercourse at Caxton, Bud was picking up ideas of what was appropriate to the surroundings of a gentleman. He was constantly surprising me with some new fastidiousness; and in that way he was a terror to Lena. She had come to worship Bud as a kind of demi-god. Any irreverence his younger brothers showed him—and these were slight enough—awakened a comic show of indignation in his little sister-in-law. So through her desire to please Bud, society worked on Lena also, and did something to improve her style.

It was a great comfort to me in those days of growing uneasiness on Bud's account, that Archer was so well and steadily employed. He could not well follow Bud to the fun and dissipation at the Court-House. Nor would he have had Bud's social success, what with his scorn of Peyton-Call's patronage, but still more because of his lack of easy good-humor. Thus it happened that the elder brother's entrance into higher social circles threw the younger rather out of the way of seeking convivial pleasures. I looked to it that he should not lack good tobacco and something to drink at home when he wanted it; and it soon came about that he was as happy to spend an even-

ing before the fire with Dr. von Baerensprung, or with me alone, as he had formerly been to tag about after his big brother and the young men of his class.

For Archer was seriously working and to a stimulating end. Dr. von Baerensprung had offered his pupil, as reward for passing a certain examination, to take him to New York for a month's stay. Archer was to earn his expenses in doing clerical work, and his friend and patron was to give him the opportunity of seeing the sights of the great city.

So one of my brothers was being led by the wise and cultivated man of science, the other by the idle and frivolous young squire; one had his ambition already fixed on a distant, yet attainable, goal, the other was chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of a coquette's favor with never a thought beyond.

In spite of my anxiety over Bud's infatuation, I was amused to see with what facility he made his social way. The poor, ignorant boy conquered his place by virtue of his beauty and the sweetness of his disposition. Indeed, his own standard of behavior, so loyally upheld in the obscurity of his cabin and woodsman life, was the standard of all his countrymen. He was too gentle to offend, too happy in social intercourse to be willing to lose a hint of what would make him more agreeable. Undoubtedly,

Peyton-Call stimulated him most, and taught him a hundred details of dress and behavior that he would not have learned from others.

Bud's admiration for the master of Caxton knew no bounds. He enjoyed above all things these Caxton Club committee meetings, as the fox-hunters called their nightly gatherings of informal and not always sober amusements. To do Peyton-Call justice, he took pretty good care of my brother on these occasions.

"You needn't look worried, Sister," Bud assured me when he had been telling me of some of the livelier aspects of the past night's revelry at Caxton; "Mr. Don has got it in his head that I sha'n't get drunk. He sent me home last night before the fun was half over, same as if I was a baby; just marched me out on the piazza, and told me he'd tell you and Miss Virgie if I forgot myself. And he won't let me play much, either. I got started with Buck Lanier the other night, and Mr. Don came along and broke me, same as I would do with Son. I declare, if it was anybody else, I would have been hopping mad, but it looks like Mr. Don can do anything, he's that pleasant about it. Lord, I wish I had his disposition. He's always the same, whether he's losing or winning, whether he's drunk or sober."

But in spite of this assurance that Bud's pres-

ent company was exemplary, I nursed a secret plan to get him away from it, and from Virgie's dangerous vicinity. By Christmas, I reflected, Archer would be gone, my school closed. What was to prevent my coaxing Bud out of Rolfe for a while. In Lennox, that county of fine horses, it seemed there was always work for Bud; but in Lennox he was never willing to stay very long at a time. If I went down there with him, I thought, he might be induced to spend the greater part of the winter there, actively and profitably employed. The great trouble was to give Bud any incentive for earning more money. I was not willing to pretend I wanted more luxuries for myself, and indeed, we were all very comfortable; but there was the rent to Caxton unpaid for years. When I reflected on our landlord's intelligence and amiability, and particularly when I considered his late friendly care of Bud, I thought I could turn this shadowy debt we owed him to a practical account. I decided to make a rather unusual appeal to him.

On the occasion of his next visit, and when we were alone, I spoke to him of the rent we owed him. He pretended alarm.

"I hope and trust you haven't any money," he exclaimed. "It's very dangerous to give me money. I never get any sleep till it's all gone, and I've had such confounded luck

with cards of late that I'm greatly in need of sleep."

"I have no money to pay my brothers' debts if I can get them to pay them themselves," I assured him. He affected great relief.

"Money is a great nuisance," he declared. "I wish we could live by barter alone."

"And rent in this region is usually paid in kind, isn't it?"

"Don't ask me! How should I know?"

"Well, who does know?"

"Who wants to know?" (Carelessly.)

"I want to know."

"Why?" (Suspiciously.)

"I want to know my brothers' contract with you, and what they owe you after all these years."

"I refer you to my lawyer." (Coldly.)

"Who is your lawyer, Mr. Peyton-Call?"

"I'm my own lawyer. All the Peyton-Calls study law in their day. I've been admitted to the Bar myself."

"Then can't you answer my question?"

"Miss Dale, I am not here to-day in my capacity as lawyer. Everything has its time and place. You may call on me at my office in the court-house, first room to the right, first floor. My hours are uncertain, but you can make an appointment."

"I've had something to do with lawyers be-

fore, Mr. Peyton-Call, and I have found them willing to call on me at my own house."

"*Willing!* That's hardly the word, is it?"

I reflected a moment as to how I could best break through his defence of frivolity, and I sat and looked into the fire. When I raised my eyes to his face again I caught a curious expression in his own. His brows were drawn slightly as if with pain. Instantly his face cleared again.

"Miss Dale, do you know how old you are?" he inquired, easily.

I was more than astonished that the correct Peyton-Call should put so unconventional a question; I was startled by a coincidence. Mr. Henry Reman had telegraphed me that very question a few days before. It had appeared to the lawyers charged with settling my affairs in New York that my renouncing Mrs. Reman's legacy had not been valid unless I was proved to have been of age at the time.

"No, I don't know my age," I answered, looking at my caller narrowly an instant. His eyes were on the floor.

"I think you must be fifty or thereabout," he suggested, lightly. "I go rather by your manner than by your appearance."

"No one knows my age," I returned, still disturbed. Of course, Peyton-Call had neither

interest in nor knowledge of the business in New York. Still, a very disagreeable idea had flashed upon me. "I may be fifty or even older," I added, with forced lightness.

He thought it likely. I had the careworn look suitable to middle age.

I was already ashamed of the thought that had occurred to me. By way of reaction I felt, more than at first, impelled to put special confidence in him.

"It seems to amuse you that I look careworn," I said, as if hurt, "and I was just thinking you could easily help me in the matter that has been troubling me."

"Consider it done!"

"It can't be considered done till you have taken the trouble to do it."

"You said—easily; but never mind!"

"I want to know just what my brothers owe you for rent, and I want to bind the payment of it on their backs as a heavy burden," I said, seriously. "I want them to grow responsible. Archer is going away; I want to bind him to his home with a debt, because he is proud. And Lilbud is married; I want him to settle old accounts and found his home on a firm basis; and I want to draw Bud away from all his folly to something like work. You are partly to blame, Mr. Peyton-Call, for their being, as you say here, so trifling. You have let

them live as squatters on your land, and that has almost pauperized them. Now I want you to pretend, as far as we are concerned, that you are a real landlord, and not make a farce of coming to collect the rent. I suppose it all amounts to very little; I suppose you are bored at the idea of taking the trouble; but you have shown a sort of interest in Bud. I have to thank you for the times that you have sent him home to me before he drank too much. Take a little more trouble now. Assume one more rôle, and play landlord."

"Can you indicate what will be the outcome of this truly remarkable programme?" he asked, with amusement.

"Yes, I think I know. Lilbud will work harder, Archer will work harder; and Bud, who has no work, will go to look for it. My brothers all have character; even light-hearted Bud wouldn't repudiate a debt. My hope is to get Bud out of Rolfe this winter, Mr. Peyton-Call. All this fun and riding isn't good for him. He must go down into Lennox, where he can get more horse-training——"

"And where the fun and riding, and particularly the drinking, are carried on more systematically and thoroughly than we have the energy to do in Rolfe," broke in Mr. Peyton-Call. "And where, moreover, he will not have a guardian angel, like myself——"

"I will be his guardian angel," I returned, smiling. "I mean to go with Bud."

"Tired of Rolfe already?" he said, with a swift and searching look.

"Mr. Peyton-Call, I did not come to Rolfe; I came to my brothers."

"They belong here."

"Lilbud does; but he does not need me. Archer is in good hands without me. I shall devote myself to Bud."

"And for the sake of this good-for-nothing young scamp you will leave us all? And you expect me to aid and abet you in this faithless desertion?"

"I was relying on your help, but if you won't take the trouble, I can get on very well alone, Mr. Peyton-Call."

"Such reliance as that," he said, amiably, "is truly touching."

He rose and took his hat, stood for a few moments as if he were considering something more to say, then rather abruptly and formally took his leave. After that it seemed absurd to have him turn at the door and assure me gravely that people usually relied on him to do exactly the wrong thing. I laughed, and for the time gave the matter no more thought. If I had not furthered my end with an appeal to our peculiar landlord I believed I had at least done my cause no harm.

That evening I spent alone in my room. Archer was gone to read with Dr. von Baerensprung; Lilbud and Lena had retired early, as they always did; and Bud was, so far as I knew, at the Court-house. I could not interest myself in my book. All my thoughts were fixed on Bud and on my plans for him. Momently the conviction grew strong that if he could be coaxed to go away with me, out of sight of Virgie altogether, he might be cured of his mad infatuation. It seemed my only line of action. There was no use of appealing to Virgie. I had several times dropped distinct hints to her that I wanted her to leave Bud alone. But that very day she had singled him out to leave the hunt with her and ride five miles across country to the Blaylock plantation, where she went to coax young Mrs. Blaylock to ride with the hounds. The three came back together on excellent terms, stopped at the school to look in and merrily greet Archer and me, and then rode on to join the hunt again. And Virgie very gayly designated her morning ride as "Mr. Dale's and my hunt for a chaperon!"

No, there was no appeal to be made to Virgie; I grew angry with her that night as I considered the pain she was bringing upon us. And I felt little more confidence in Peyton-Call. He had not refused to do my bidding in

regard to demanding the rent of my brothers; but now I realized how disagreeable the business would probably be to him, and I gave up all hope of his aid. It seemed to rest wholly with myself to stir the matter up and to get the boys interested in paying the long debt. With Archer I felt it would be comparatively easy. He disliked Peyton-Call—the truth was, he envied him as much as he scorned him—and it was certain he would want to throw off the burden of obligation. I relied on Archer's help to bring Bud to the sense of what was due his dignity. What "Son" thought and felt was forever of tender interest to the elder brother. My own insistence on business principles might strike Bud as rather an unfortunate vestige of my Yankee training.

The hours flew by, I heard Archer come in, and still there was no sound of Bud's return. He was rarely out later than midnight, and I felt unhappy as I sat and watched for him. At last I grew weary and went to bed and to sleep.

But my sleep was uneasy and I awoke when Bud's footfall sounded in the hall outside my door. I started up to listen and I heard him go into the sitting-room opposite instead of to the wing where he slept. Without knowing why, I rose and threw a wrap about me and went out to see what Bud was doing.

He had left the sitting-room door open, and

had lit the lamp. To my great surprise, I saw him standing there before the mantel holding the light up to his autograph in the log, as he had on the first night of my coming home. He stood immovable and seemed absorbed in the contemplation of the three rudely written words, "Robert Dale, Oner."

"Bud," I said, softly, stepping in behind him and closing the door. He turned without starting and smiled at me.

"Well, Sister, you ought to be asleep. It's mighty nigh mornin'," he said, as he put the lamp back on the table. "I reckon I waked you up, honey, didn't I?"

"What are you doing here, Bud? Why do you read your name?" I asked, coming up and leaning on his shoulder.

"It ain't so much the name," he returned, and his mellow voice vibrated slightly. "It's the word that comes after that does me good to look at to-night—for the word's come true, Lil' Cassy; and I reckon I'm about the best satisfied man in Rolfe to-night."

He put his hands into my hair and caressed me idly. His eyes turned again to the writing on the wall. "Yes, it's come true," he repeated, as I faltered a question. "I own this place now, sure enough; this place and this house, me and my heirs forever. I can't be turned off like some poor-white tenant."

"Bud, do you mean you want to buy it?" I asked, too puzzled to think clearly.

"No, ma'am, it's mine," he said, jubilantly, and he snatched up the lamp again, and with an arm around my shoulders drew me up to where he had stood before. "Do you see it, Cassy? Owner! That's what I wrote before I knew how it was to come true. The Dales have got a home, the Dales are rooted in Rolfe at last. The Dales can show what's in them now. There are three gentleman's places this side of the Court-house now. There's Caxton and The Terraces, and between them is the place of Robert Dale. And it's just good luck that gave it to me, nothing in the world but luck; and if she's going to favor me now, I'm blamed if I won't trust her for more."

I began to sob and he put down the lamp and took me tenderly into his arms.

"I reckoned you'd be pleased, Sister——"

"You haven't told me——"

"Well, it's easy told. Mr. Don and I have been playing cards. We were riding together from the Court-house, and he asked me to stop at Caxton and have a game with him. He said he was about bored to death for some amusement and he'd play away Caxton to-night rather than not play at all. Lord, what an out-and-out gambler he is, to be sure! As soon as we got into his study, and he had his hands on

the cards he was as gay as anything; and the more he lost the more he seemed to enjoy it."

Bud laughed with a pleased air as he thought of it, and when I drew away from him aghast and sank into a chair he seated himself comfortably on the arm of it and stroked my hand as he continued, cheerfully:

"We hadn't either of us enough change to make it much fun. Mr. Don declared he was in the mood for high stakes, and presently he put up this farm and this house and all the back rent I owe him against three years of my constant service in horse-training at Caxton. You see, I hadn't any property to put up, and I was just obliged to stake my time like that. I tell you, Sister, it was a pretty exciting game. I didn't want to be bound down like that to train Mr. Don's horses for three years, and I did want mightily to win this place. Mr. Don was as cool as you please. He looked at me with those curious, smiling eyes now and then, and played on without talking; and I wanted to talk every minute. I was so excited I didn't know what I was doing, and I didn't know I had won till Mr. Don, he said in that cool, quiet way of his: 'Well, Bud, you've cleaned me out! I congratulate you, old man.' And then, I tell you, Sister, I was mighty nigh ready to whoop and holler with joy. Mr. Don, he laughed and gave me a drink, and told me

to go home and not to wake you; and I tried to be quiet, but I'm most too glad."

I looked up into his radiant face with perfect hopelessness. My thoughts flew back and forth between my brother and this strange Donald Peyton-Call, who had so promptly cut away my only chance for removing Bud from Rolfe.

The next day I found voice and courage for a strenuous protest against Bud's acceptance of the title-deed to the farm and house belonging to Caxton. To my chagrin, not one of my brothers understood or heeded me. Bud had won the place in fair and honest play. That mode of acquiring property was as honorable as any. A gentleman was expected to pay his gambling debts without a murmur. If Mr. Don had wished to pay such a price for one night's fun, who were we to object?

"I think you are taking the land as a gift from him," I told Bud, gravely.

"Why should he want to give me land?" inquired Bud, carelessly, and I had no answer to the question.

Peyton-Call himself left me in no doubt whatsoever. He came to me with the most abject and insincere humility, and confessed that in his passion for play he had forgotten my wishes, and thrown away his chance for serving me. He deplored, with laughter in

his eyes, that he had no longer the power to drive Bud to work in Lennox, where, with me to take care of him, he would assuredly have made more of himself than he could in Rolfe. He wished with all his heart he had not been so "absent-minded," and ended by asking me to trust him with some other commission so that he might redeem himself.

"Of course, when I asked Bud to stop at Caxton, I meant to talk business with him," he explained. "But we fell upon cards and the temptation was too great for me."

He had one of his rare moments of gravity then, and continued, in a different voice:

"——and if I dared tell you the whole force of that temptation, you would pity me, I think."

I told myself I did not understand in the least what he meant; still I refrained from asking him the natural question.

The conveyance was accomplished within a day or two, and Bud openly and publicly gloried in his new distinction. As to our friends and neighbors, each had his own verdict on the subject.

"I certainly am glad," said Virgie, easily. "It's a good thing all around. Poor Don gets rid of some of his surplus land and you-all get a more assured standing-ground. I hope in time, Cassy, that you will own the whole of

Caxton. The estate isn't a bit too big for you, my princess!"

Dr. von Baerensprung heard it with a slight frown and thought that Caxton had been "*leichtsinnig; aber diesmal ein bischen sehr!*" Mr. Baumann found it a good text for a long harangue on his neighbor's character. Colonel Fanton also delivered his opinion of his young friend's gambling losses.

"Don is sometimes a little reckless, but in this case his loss is so slight that he is scarcely to be blamed. Caxton is such a very large and very rich estate that its owner can afford to throw away a little in amusement."

"The king can do no wrong," was Virgie's sarcastic comment when she repeated her father's words to me. "Papa is bound by some sort of an ancient hoodoo to see all Don's affairs in a rosy light. You couldn't get papa to admit that Don is poor, not if you brought him the tax-roll to read. Tell you for a fact, Cassy, if I had married Don, papa would have pretended that I had made a rich marriage. Before I broke my engagement papa used to talk about my going from a simple to a more luxurious home; all foolishness! Everybody knows that Don has to chase away a lot of darkies every now and then, because he hasn't enough to feed them; and when they all come swarming back it's a sign he's had luck at

cards. And still papa pretends Don gambles for amusement."

On the whole, it was in order for Rolfe County people to joke Peyton-Call and to congratulate Bud on the transfer of the property. I seemed to be the only soul who saw anything wrong in Bud's accepting it.

Now that he was a full-fledged planter and the head of a house Bud rode about more gloriously than ever.

"Looks like he gets handsomer every day," observed Lena, craning her slim neck after him as he rode away one morning. "D'you reckon Miss Virgie'll catch him, Sis' Cassy? She sure is in love with him right now."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. PEYTON-CALL MAKES TROUBLE

THROUGHOUT the summer I had maintained my pleasant social relation with the Baumanns, though all the visiting was from my side. Mrs. Baumann declined roundly to take the trouble to come to see me.

"Wozu dass? I can talk better here. I never go out," she declared, when I invited her; her statement was literally true. She was a woman wholly absorbed in her house and children. Stubbornly simple, but with an occasional display of unexpected humor; a pious Roman Catholic and yet with an admiration and respect for the free thought of her husband. She was devoted to her guest, the Freiherr von Baerensprung, proud of his learning and distinction, and of his affection for them all; yet, in any disagreement between him and her Wilhelm, she set the Herr Doctor entirely at naught. I sometimes thought that she suffered me rather because her husband was interested in me than because I was anything to her personally. She disapproved openly of my dress, my apparent leisure, my

readiness to differ in argument with the men of the household, and, to sum up all, because I took life too carelessly. But she was uniformly kind and hearty in spite of this. As I knew few women in Rolfe and because she was so handsome, quaint, and individual, I accepted the rather cold terms of her friendship and went to her house as often as I could find the time.

Meanwhile my friendship with her husband did not run in channels absolutely free from obstruction. He was so blunt and didactic, so uncertain of temper and ungenial in most of his judgments, that in spite of his undeniable intelligence he was a very provoking man. Dr. von Baerensprung and I were forever siding against him in argument. While we kept cool and amused he would begin to grow red in the face and violent in word. He always talked well and usually, to be just, with more practical good sense than we. Dr. von Baerensprung took mischievous delight in maintaining the indefensible. His friendship with Mr. Baumann was a clear case of antipodal attraction. For me, I could not easily forgive Mr. Baumann his particular faults. Accustomed as I was to the chivalry of my brothers, I resented his superior and inconsiderate manners toward his wife, his severity in judging his neighbors, and the bluff, rough

ways toward the men who worked for him. He had, in short, a high notion of his own mission to set other people right. In that community of mild-mannered people I easily conceived how profoundly he could be disliked.

Returning from a Saturday morning call at The Terraces I met Mr. Peyton-Call in the road. I was mounted on Molly, a blanket cinched about her by way of a side-saddle, and as I was no very good rider I was creeping along at a snail's pace for fear of being jolted off. Mr. Peyton-Call turned about to accompany me and amused himself with a relentless ridicule of my mount. Why had I kept it a secret that I was such a daring horsewoman? Why had I not joined in the fox-hunts with this accoutrement? Was this the habit—I wore a summer gown that warm October morning—in which I had ridden in Central Park? etc. I returned his remarks in kind and we were laughing when we met Mr. Baumann. It chanced that the road was narrow; we led aside into the woods to let the wagon pass, Molly stumbled slightly and I went sliding off. Mr. Baumann was out of his wagon and Mr. Peyton-Call off his horse in an instant; I was not in the least hurt and had a laugh with them at my own expense. The two men seemed to meet each other pleasantly enough;

or, rather, I was struck by Mr. Baumann's unusual cordiality. Mr. Peyton-Call met everyone pleasantly.

"I haven't answered your letter, Mr. Baumann; I counted on seeing you," he said, politely, after he had mounted me. "I am very sorry, sir, not to oblige you about that little piece of land; but it is not for sale."

Mr. Baumann's face was a study of consternation and amazement.

"I asked you to fix the price, Mr. Peyton-Call; I know the value of the property—" he began.

"No, I think I won't consider selling at any price," returned Peyton-Call, pleasantly. "It's rather a favorite haunt of mine; a charming and romantic spot. You, a German, Mr. Baumann, will appreciate the question of sentimental association."

He mounted as he spoke and smiled at his neighbor pleasantly. Mr. Baumann was red in the face, incapable of saying a word. He returned our salutes with the barest gesture to the rim of his hat, and so we separated.

"Will you pardon my talking business before you?" asked Mr. Peyton-Call, lightly. "It is not good manners, I am aware; but I have neglected to write Mr. Baumann my refusal to an offer he made me, and I am afraid he may involve himself in the business if I make any further delay."

Now I knew very well that Mr. Baumann had already dealt with Colonel Fanton for the purchase of the head-water tract, and I realized how very serious it might be for my German friend to be unable to buy the mill-site. For the rest, I was as puzzled as Mr. Baumann over Peyton-Call's refusal to sell. My brothers had been talking openly of late how deeply Caxton was in debt.

"These people haven't the slightest notion of how we feel in Rolfe on the subject of keeping our estates intact—" began my companion, with a tinge of haughtiness. He met my look of surprise and flushed and laughed.

"I mean to say," he corrected himself with impudent ease, "that foreigners can't estimate how particular we are in Rolfe as to what sort of neighbors we admit."

"Do you know what Mr. Baumann wants of the mill-site?" I asked, gravely. "Not to build a dwelling-house and live there, I suppose."

"Can't imagine what he wants of it," he returned with an idle drawl.

I noticed one thing; quick-witted as he usually was, he had apparently not noticed how much knowledge of the situation my own remark had implied. Mill-site had not been mentioned in the snatch of conversation I had just overheard.

"I am incapable of selling anything," con-

tinued Mr. Peyton-Call. "There seems to be a fatal flaw in my make-up which unfits me for business; and yet I can buy all day long. It seems to amuse me to buy."

"Rather an expensive form of amusement!" I observed.

"All pleasure is expensive," he returned, genially. "There is the origin of the expression—'It costs like fun.' That means, I take it, that fun costs more than anything else."

"Mine doesn't," said I. "I get my fun in the daily increase and prosperity of our house."

"Ah! But didn't it cost you a fortune to get here?" he inquired, quickly.

"Did I tell you that?" I asked, a little startled.

"Didn't you mean to?" he returned, with an incomprehensible swift look. "In that case consider it untold. I erase it from my memory. But if you did mean to trust me—tell me more."

Now I had never said one word to him of my affairs. I felt my blood mounting. His offhand reference, his pretence of having the information from me direct, and his bid for my confidence, all seemed very bold. And what was there behind it? The show of mere idle curiosity was unexpected, to say the least, in the well-bred Peyton-Call.

"When gossips have done their utmost, as in

this case, there's nothing more to tell," I observed, with the intention of shaming him a little.

"Nothing more?" he inquired, with that curious narrowing of the eyes, that singular touch of hostility, which every now and then I met in him.

I was somewhat taken aback; as a matter of fact, there was something more: my home-coming had not yet cost me a fortune. In New York—but not by any chance could this have reached Rolfe's gossips—several lawyers were busy helping me rid myself of the burden of the money I did not want. They still had to prove me of age. There were still forms to be observed before my renunciation was complete, and Mrs. Reman's legal heirs could get a claim to her property.

But why should Peyton-Call utter his question, "nothing more?" as if he had caught me in an effort of pretence? On what grounds could it remotely concern himself? Certainly he was not the man to hope, as Dr. von Baerensprung had at first, that I was a great capitalist come to develop the county resources. Peyton-Call showed only a haughty disregard for money matters. He had given away a farm to Bud for a whim, he refused a good offer for his mill on another whim. Impatiently I gave up the puzzle as to what was behind his strange attack.

Mr. Peyton-Call Makes Trouble

The day after being Sunday, I was at Mrs. Baumann's Kaffeetisch in the afternoon. The cups had been cleared away, and we were playing a war-game on the table-cloth with Karl's tin soldiers. Dr. von Baerensprung was obviously of military experience—he was defeating his opponents, the children and me, at every turn. The play was of absorbing interest, and I was loth to be interrupted by Mrs. Baumann, who asked me to leave this childishness and come into the house with her; she had something to say to me. To my festive mood, her manner was too serious; and when she opened her subject I was surprised and vexed beyond description. It was nothing more or less than my acquaintance with Peyton-Call. Her explanations and apologies were few enough, the long and short of her speech was remonstrance. I had been out "pleasure-riding" with Mr. Peyton-Call; Mr. Baumann had observed that I seemed on excellent terms with him; Mr. Baumann had thought that I must be unaware that the man was a profligate and a good-for-nothing, and possibly a dangerous acquaintance for an "alone-standing young girl." Mr. Baumann had felt it was their—the Baumanns's—duty to speak to me on the subject, since I was so young and inexperienced and without the protection of parents.

If the wife had not so constantly quoted the

husband in speaking to me thus, if she had even feigned a personal interest in the matter, I might have taken it in good part; but it was not Mrs. Baumann's way to feign anything. My affairs really did not concern her greatly—she was literally carrying out her husband's directions. I knew very well what recent cause of wrath Peyton-Call had given my neighbor, and I was indignant.

"Mrs. Baumann, believe me, I don't need this sort of looking after," I answered her, in as sweet a tone as I could command. "I have a sister-in-law to chaperon me, you know."

The humor of the suggestion was lost upon her, as she had not seen Lena.

"And I can judge Mr. Peyton-Call better than Mr. Baumann can, because I have seen more of him," I continued, serenely. "Mr. Baumann occasionally meets him in business—isn't that all?"

"As if that mattered. Men know other men," she said, impatiently. "One hears about him."

"If I had judged you and Mr. Baumann by hearsay I should never have come near you," I said rather insincerely, for only lately I had learned how unpopular they were. "Some people say you are unfriendly and critical and inhospitable; and I have found you so different."

I would never have dared to tell an American woman such a verdict of her neighbors. To the German it was a matter of supreme indifference.

"What care I what they say? We are what we are!"

"It's a gossiping neighborhood," I continued, with an affectation of plaintiveness. "They say that Dr. von Baerensprung is an escaped convict——"

"Himmel!" cried Mrs. Baumann, aghast.

"And that I am an adventuress—" I continued, gravely.

"Mein Gott!" she exclaimed.

"And that Mr. Baumann takes opium and is in such a stupor when he drives that he can't raise his hat to people," I continued with relish.

"Nein, du Lieber—!" cried the wife. "Nun hört aber alles auf!"

"So of course we can't go by what people say," I continued, cheerfully. "Very likely Mr. Peyton-Call also is maligned. At any rate, Mrs. Baumann, I have no reason for dropping his acquaintance. He is our landlord and a pleasant neighbor."

I spoke very decidedly, but she was already far away from my affairs. "Wilhelm und opium!" she muttered to herself indignantly; and she had still a heightened color when I took my leave.

I had amused myself and was in a good humor again. Mr. Baumann, when he heard from his wife how I had taken his warnings, was anything but that; and presently came an occurrence which put our relation to a greater strain.

Archer and I had from twenty to thirty pupils in our school, most of them of the poor-white class. Though here was my chance to work for my own people, I took more interest in Karl and Trautchen Baumann, who were far and away more alert and teachable. I found it hard to class them with their dull and soft-spoken little schoolmates. Karl, to be sure, was often rough and unmanageable, the one small rebel in all my school. Archer proposed from time to time to whip the little fellow soundly, but I had detrimental theories on that subject and forbade the use of the ferule.

It was just before the close of school on Monday afternoon; I was at my desk giving out lessons when Mr. Peyton-Call appeared in the open doorway.

"Is this—ah—the Caxton school?" he inquired with an impudent affectation of timidity. I coldly bowed assent, wondering what nonsense he was up to now, and the children stared. He came in and looked about at the bleak little place with some curiosity.

"Pardon me," he said, with a courteous air. "I believe it is my official duty to inspect it."

Archer sent him a withering look from the other end of the room where he was writing on the blackboard. I could sympathize with my younger brother's vexation. Mr. Peyton-Call seemed to have come to ridicule us and the work we were taking so seriously.

"Please be seated," I said, in manner frigidly polite, "and pray feel free to hold an examination."

"That is the order, is it?" he asked. "Will you kindly call your first class in spelling."

I complied, and the children came creeping forward rather reluctantly. It chanced that Trautchen Baumann led the class, and her brother Karl came next to her.

"*Endeavor*," said Mr. Peyton-Call to Trautchen; she spelled it correctly.

"Next," said Mr. Peyton-Call.

"She spelled it right," snarled Karl.

"I know she did. I want to see whether you can spell it," he explained, too lazy to think of another word.

"Of course I can, after her," cried Karl, contemptuously.

Mr. Peyton-Call frowned slightly.

"Spell it then," he commanded.

"It ain't the right way to ask," muttered Karl, rebelliously. "I want a new word."

"Karl, spell *endeavor* at once," said I.

"I *won't*," he yelled, with a gesture of defiance.

"Is that the way you speak to your teacher?" asked Mr. Peyton-Call, sternly. "Hold out your hand."

"You dassn't hit me," cried the child, angrily; but he put out his palm and Mr. Peyton-Call gave it a light cut with his riding-whip. Karl let forth an indignant howl, Trautchen burst into tears, and all the children tittered.

"I'm going home," wailed Karl. "Trautchen, bring my books. I'm going home."

"Certainly you are going home," I said, mustering my severity. "Do you think I want such a naughty, disrespectful boy in my schoolroom?"

"I'm going, too," sobbed Trautchen. "I'm going with Karl."

She was too excited to listen to reason, and I was glad to be rid of them both for the moment. They took their books from their desks, still sobbing bitterly, poor little things, and marched off hand in hand.

Mr. Peyton-Call was contented with the mischief he had done and declined to examine any further. He remained while I dismissed the school. A few children were "kept in" and Archer set them their tasks.

"You saw a fine example of my discipline,"

I remarked to our visitor as I put my desk in order.

"I am shocked," he returned with mock gravity. "I expected to find you ruling with a rod of iron."

"To be frank," I returned, taking care that the children should not hear me, "my sympathies were entirely with Karl. He has never before behaved so badly. You were very provoking with your departure from tradition."

"As if I didn't know how to inspect schools!" he exclaimed. "It has been my chief profession and principal office for years."

"I thought you were chairman of the board."

"I am everything," he returned, nonchalantly. "I can keep you in or put you out."

"Is this a threat?" I asked, with a slight laugh.

"No, indeed," he hastened to assure me. "I merely hoped to make an effect. When I was young, teachers used to be very gracious to members of the board."

"I haven't been a teacher long enough to learn such policy."

"I hope, Miss Dale, you will try to make up this little deficiency in yourself before the holidays," he said, airily. "We are otherwise satisfied with you and should like to retain you. We may give you an official examination before long on the ways and means of conciliating school-trustees."

"And the official examiner—" I began.

"I am he," he interrupted, smiling. "I am everything."

He stood with one foot on the platform and an arm on my desk, in an attitude of lounging ease, evidently with no intention of departing before I did. I arranged with Archer to stay with the children and accepted Mr. Peyton-Call's escort, being in some haste to get home, and to call on Mrs. Baumann to talk over the affair of Karl.

The Caxton school-house is back from the road and a long narrow lane leads up to it. Striding along this rapidly came Mr. Baumann, his hat pulled down over a clouded and angry face. He scarcely more than touched the brim as he stopped before us.

"Miss Dale, Karl tells me he was whipped in school."

"He was, Mr. Baumann, and I am sorry to say he quite deserved it," I returned promptly.

"He told me everything that happened," said Mr. Baumann, in an angered tone, "and I have come to tell you that I disapprove entirely of your treatment of my boy. I will not put up with it."

What he had really come to say, I never knew, of course. It is very improbable that with his past friendly feeling for me and with his usual good sense he would have spoken

with this display of temper had he not found me in the company against which he had just had me warned.

"Mr. Baumann, permit me to say that you are addressing the wrong person," put in Peyton-Call, in a cool, vibrating voice. "It was I who whipped your boy; and I will take pleasure in thrashing you if you speak to this lady again in that tone. If, as a parent, you have any complaint to make of the school, you are free to lay it before the board."

I was dismayed beyond measure as I looked from one man to the other; and as Mr. Baumann was for the moment too furious to make reply, I had a chance to speak.

"Mr. Baumann has said nothing to annoy me, Mr. Peyton-Call," I said, in a cold tone. "You mistake the situation. And," I continued to Mr. Baumann, "I suppose I must expect unreasonable complaints from parents who hear only the child's version before they attack the teacher's policy. I confess, Mr. Baumann, I expected more consideration from you. I shall call on Mrs. Baumann to-night to speak to her about Karl. He is very much spoiled, very rude—but I am interested in him and should hate to request that he be taken from my school."

I have no doubt my assurance angered him the more, but it left him nothing to say. I

bowed and passed him at once and Mr. Peyton-Call had to follow me.

"If you are exposed to that sort of thing, this is the end of your teaching," he said, with heat.

"Never before," I returned, very much vexed. On what pretence did he mean to end my teaching? "I have never been exposed to anything like it. My career ran smoothly till it was complicated by official school-inspection."

"I trust that you won't let the matter trouble you," said he. "I shall see this man——"

"That is all that troubles me," I cried, with irritation. "I don't want you to see the man. What have you really to do with the matter, Mr. Peyton-Call?"

"What is your idea of an escort?" he demanded. "The fellow's tone was insufferable. I am ashamed that I did not knock him down; but I hate to come to blows before a lady."

"Mr. Peyton-Call, you don't understand," I said, more quietly, after we had walked as far as the road. I took a less rapid pace and spoke to him gravely. "Mr. Baumann had no idea of insulting me. We are very good friends. There is nothing more or less involved than a standard of manners. You see a disrespect in the tone of his voice—he would call it disrespect in you to come to the school to tease me. I dislike one form as much as the other; and can easily forgive you both."

He looked as though I had struck him, and I felt a pang of unreasonable compunction; but, on the whole, it relieved me to have spoken plainly. If I had hurt him sufficiently to make him avoid me in future I had at least rid myself of the disagreeable doubt as to why he had approached me at all. I could leave unsolved the puzzle as to why he had learned my story.

Meanwhile we walked on in hazardous silence; for silence fast builds a sort of intimacy around participants. The formal and bantering terms we had maintained till then were broken. I was perplexed as to how they could be reimposed.

In my door he held out his hand to me.

"I want to be forgiven," he said, with a winning appeal. "Not in a group with Baumann, but individually. Believe me, Miss Dale, this is the first time I have had to apologize for too great ardor in performing my public duties."

This impudent reference to the farce at the school provoked me.

"I shall forget all about my annoyance," I said, coldly, and I gave him my hand. "Good-by."

"Why not good-evening?" he asked. "You know you'll see me every day; that is, I'll try to see you every day."

"Suppose I ask you not to come," I suggested, sternly.

"I rely on your being just and merciful," he exclaimed. "I have really not behaved so badly as to deserve banishment."

I laughed rather vexedly at his airs and advised him to bring his language down from the grandiloquent style when he talked to a matter-of-fact district-school teacher like myself.

"Will you remember me to your sister, Mrs. Dale," he said in a subdued voice, and a look which did not match it very well, "and tell her I hope to call on her to-morrow?"

And thus having conveyed to me that he did not intend to be forbidden the house, he took his formal leave.

I went to see Mrs. Baumann that very afternoon. Her view of Mr. Peyton-Call's motive for switching Karl was so absurd that I was reluctantly forced to the defence of my school-inspector, instead of voicing, as I had intended, my entire disapproval of him. It passed my comprehension how she could suppose a gentleman would strike a child because he disliked its father. I told her roundly that her boy, around whom the household turned at home, was an undistinguished unit in the mass of the school-children.

"He knew him by his likeness to Wilhelm," cried the injured mother, speaking German in her excitement. "He hates Wilhelm, because they are always opposed. If he did not hate

Wilhelm personally he would have sold him the mill. He needs the money, it is all to his interest to sell; but he sees a chance for playing a malicious trick on Wilhelm by refusing to sell, and his malice is more to him than his debts. He knows Wilhelm is in trouble with this dreadful Colonel Fanton about the land, and he is glad of it. Whatever belongs to Wilhelm he hates."

I was rather surprised at this view of the matter, and had not the least faith that it was correct. As far as I knew Peyton-Call, malice was not in him. What astonished me still more was that Mrs. Baumann, with all her list of injuries, said nothing about the threat in the lane. Whether Mr. Baumann was really ashamed of his rude tone to me, or whether his own roughness made him thick-skinned, he had not even mentioned the matter to his wife.

"There is no talking to you to-day," I said severely to Mrs. Baumann. "You must get quiet and reasonable first. Where is Mr. Baumann? I want to talk with him."

She bade me, crossly enough, look him up in the orchard, where he and Dr. von Baerensprung were grafting. I joined them out there, and was greeted very gruffly by my host, with the usual cordiality by his guest.

"I want to tell you, Mr. Baumann," I began, with courage, "that you did me a great wrong

to-day, for which I think you will be sorry. You might know, I think, that I was as irritated as you could be that Mr. Peyton-Call should stroll into my class-room, out of sheer idleness, and worry the children with a farcical examination, and end by striking one of them. For a man who has analyzed Mr. Peyton-Call, as you have done, I think it very curious that you couldn't have put the blame entirely on him and seen that I was at a disadvantage. He was there for his own idle amusement, we know, but he has the indubitable right to be there when he pleases; so if I had sided with you instead of with him I should have only made matters worse."

"Well, here is some good sense for you, Wilhelm," said Dr. von Baerensprung. "Come, confess you have been a bit of an ass. Fancy, Miss Cassandra, these foolish people have it in their heads that our lazy friend, Caxton, would take the trouble to injure them where he could."

"And so he does," exclaimed Mr. Baumann, bitterly. "What does it else mean, this insane refusal to sell me the mill-site? I would not care, but I am already in the clutches of this greedy Fanton. He pretends I have already bought the head-water tract. He will sue me for payment."

"Oh, Mr. Baumann, I am so sorry," I exclaimed, with real sympathy. I realized that

this venture might involve the German's whole capital.

"But Fanton has no case," said Dr. von Baerensprung.

"He is a native here, and I am a stranger," exclaimed Mr. Baumann. "He knows every trick with the courts that can be played. It's not the man who has the case who wins a lawsuit in Rolfe. More than likely I shall get these square miles of desert foisted on me, and be obliged to pay—and all the fault of this confounded Peyton-Call. Why won't he sell? You heard him, Miss Cassandra. The plot is picturesque; he has sentimental associations with it. As if he were a prince who could afford his whims. The devil take his arrogance! His land is loaded with delinquent taxes; in any other county in the South he would be sold out, and he and his darkies would starve; and this is the way he meets a business proposition!"

Sorry as I felt for Mr. Baumann, I could not but be amused and somewhat relieved at the light weight he set upon the occurrence in the lane. In truth, the man was so plagued by the scrape in which he found himself that he could think of nothing else.

Dr. von Baerensprung walked home with me that evening, having set my escort, Archer, to some work of his own.

"Now Wilhelm Baumann is going to reap the bitter fruits of his unpopularity in Rolfe, I fear," he said, rather gravely. "He really stands little chance of getting justice done him if he is involved with Colonel Fanton. It is too bad, of course, that a man should have to pay for refusing to be as pleasant-spoken as his neighbors; but there is a sort of rough justice in it, too. He has been unsympathetic with the people of Rolfe; they won't come to his aid in witnessing against Colonel Fanton."

"Surely, he must be able to prove that he has made no formal agreement to take the land," I urged. "It can't be a matter of his popularity as to whether he shall have justice?"

"Well, as to proofs," returned Dr. von Baerensprung, "there were letters, and they haven't been kept; so as for Wilhelm Baumann's proofs they are only worth what a jury of twelve men of Rolfe, who do not like him, will consider their value. I'm afraid it will go hard with our friend. My advice is that he shall take the land and pay without resistance. In time Caxton will be in debt sufficiently to be forced to sell. I don't like the outlook, but it is Wilhelm's only chance."

CHAPTER XV

THE FIRST BREAK

ARCHER had stood the examination that Dr. von Baerensprung required and was to get his reward, a month's stay in New York, when the Christmas holidays closed the school. I had let my friends, the Henry Remans, know that my brother would be in the city, and they responded with invitations, cordial and urgent, that Archer should make his stay with them. This was incompatible with the work that Dr. von Baerensprung meant him to do, and not in any event what I wanted. The Remans lived in luxury great enough to dazzle Archer; and feeling themselves under obligations to me, who was out of their reach, they would have petted Archer more than would have been good for him. But I wanted my brother to know the Remans. As it was my hope, openly expressed to Archer, that he should ultimately find work in New York, I gladly expected that he should make my friends his own, and looked forward gratefully to the help they were sure to give him.

But happy as we were over the great oppor-

tunity, Archer and I both felt grave when on the eve of his departure we locked the door of our little school-house, where we had worked together. We both felt that a happy time had ended, whatever of good was to befall.

"I wish you were going with me, Sister," he exclaimed. "It looks like it would all be easy. But I know I'm going to die of homesickness up yonder, with neither you nor Bud. Bud, he can't go with me. He's fixed in Rolfe forever, I reckon, and that's the best thing for him; but you, Sister, don't rightly belong here."

"Oh, Archer, I do belong here," I answered, on the verge of tears. "I belong with Bud."

"Bud's pretty nearly worrying you to death right now," continued Archer, in a lowered voice. "Do you reckon I don't see how you feel about him? And Mr. Don is worrying you, too."

"Not in the least, Archer. Set your mind at ease as to that."

"He had better not trouble you!" exclaimed my brother, hotly.

"Dear Archer, suppose you let me take care of myself," I suggested. "I am older than you, and a good deal more experienced; and you may rest assured that if I saw any reason for dropping Mr. Peyton-Call's acquaintance, I could do it without the least difficulty."

"Oh, I don't doubt that," he returned, excitedly; "but I—blamed—I declare—sister——"

"Out with it," I encouraged him.

"You are beginning to like him," he burst forth, desperately. "He's more like the people you've been used to. There's no one else here——"

"Remember, Archer, that I've been contrasting him daily with Dr. von Baerensprung. Do you think this poor Mr. Peyton-Call will dazzle me when I compare him with our friend?" I asked, amused and pained at once.

"I know it! And now Dr. von Baerensprung is going away—and you are fixing to get outdone with Miss Virgie—and Bud's going to be a fool—and you're mighty nigh out with the Baumanns because of that confounded school trouble. And Lena is a nuisance at home. You're going to get lonely. He'll be around day after day, always the same, always amusing. There's just one thing he's good for in the world, and that is to wait. He'll wait till he's the only person near you, and then he'll—want to marry you."

I laughed at this, and then fell into a brown study. The fact that the thought had entered Archer's head was proof that he, like Bud, was in no wise alive to the lowliness of our family. Now I fancied Archer in New York, with his

handsome, eager face and assured air; introduced as the assistant and pupil of the Freiherr von Baerensprung. Was it not more than likely that Archer would quickly rise to a success that would separate him forever from his brothers; Bud and Lilbud in Rolfe, poor, illiterate, the one married to a woman of the lowest poor-white class; and Archer in New York, in intellectual circles, very possibly even becoming a man of fashion? Undoubtedly we had certain traits, we Dales, to fit us for ease and pleasure.

"Go with me, Sister," Archer begged. "We can come back to see Bud in the spring."

"We could not come back heart and soul," I returned. "If I went with you now, the family would divide into three parts, and Bud would be alone. Then my coming to Rolfe would have been good for nothing but to scatter my brothers, who lived so happily and contentedly together."

"I reckon we needed to be scattered, Sister," said Archer, thoughtfully.

"And you will really be better off for a while to live with Dr. von Baerensprung than if you and I set up house-keeping together," I continued, cheerfully. "It costs a great deal to live in New York, Archer, and you can't earn enough at first to keep us both. You will see that when you get there. I could work,

too, of course; but you would be grieved to see me in the struggle in the whirl which, for yourself, you will enjoy. No, Son, we are better off, all of us, to let you go with our good friend. Perhaps your heart will cling more loyally to Rolfe for my being here."

"Well, there's no doubt about that," he exclaimed, warmly. "The place where my beautiful sister lives is home."

At his words a strange pang shot through my heart, a pain for Bud. Here was the boy he had adored, with his allegiance turned suddenly aside. "Son," whom Bud had "raised" himself and gloried in, was not considering Bud in this great change. I was jealous for Bud, grieved for him, almost ready to push back this affection of Archer's, which seemed to be robbed from our eldest brother.

In truth, Bud's attitude toward Archer's departure was one of silent disapproval. He liked and trusted Dr. von Baerensprung as we all did, but he saw in him no superiority to the rest of us, set no particular value on his influence. It was well enough that Son was going to work. Bud himself never loved to be idle. But surely it was a career to teach the Caxton school. Surely a man could get educated up to the top notch without going among Yankees.

"Mr. Don thinks well of your going, Son," Bud conveyed to his brother, by way of en-

couragement, when he himself found nothing pleasant to say. And Archer set his teeth and made no reply. The brothers had grown apart in sympathy in the few months that I had been between them. I tried to believe that, as Archer had said, they "needed to be scattered."

"I know you won't let Archer grow away from us too fast," I said to Dr. von Baerensprung, when I bade him good-by.

He shook his head, smilingly.

"He must grow a good deal nearer to his home than he has been of late," he returned. "It takes all that knowledge of the world can do for a man to make him appreciative of Rolfe. The highest flower of life is the social quality which, here in Rolfe, blows wild like hedge-roses. Archer has been glum, self-absorbed, critical of his neighbors. The great city, with its discipline, will knock that out of him. In short, New York will improve his manners, to the delight of your brother Bud."

It chanced that Mr. Peyton-Call was at our house when Dr. von Baerensprung came to make his farewell call, and I witnessed the parting between the two men.

"We are sorry to see you go, sir," said the gentleman of Rolfe. "You have done a great deal for us here. I am not speaking of your liberal instruction in matters scientific."

"No, I think not," interrupted the Freiherr,

laughing. "As far as forestry is concerned, I have found you as conservative as an old cypress stump."

"But the pleasant point of view from which you have regarded us has had its value," continued Peyton-Call. "There's never been a good word, or a just one, spoken for Rolfe from the outside world until you spoke it. Now that we can claim that a foreigner of rank and distinction has known us and approved of us, we shall more gayly than ever defy the world."

"Do so!" cried Dr. von Baerensprung, with great amusement. Then they shook each other heartily by the hand. It was "Good-by, Baerensprung!" and "May we meet again, Caxton!" and so they parted.

"That man," was Mr. Peyton-Call's comment, when Dr. von Baerensprung had gone, "has left us just in time. If he had stayed a month longer in Rolfe he would have destroyed all that he most delighted in."

I expressed surprise at this declaration.

"Because he is a philosopher; because it's his function to make one conscious of what one is about," continued Mr. Peyton-Call, idly. "See what his attitude has been toward us here! He has said, 'You are the gayest, and most shiftless, and most hopeless set of people I have seen in my world-wide travels,

and I like you so. I am glad you won't take any steps for your own improvement. You are more picturesque unimproved. I tell you all about forestry, but I am amused that you can't or won't understand me. Go on, get worse. It is a delightful spectacle to the disinterested observer.' This is practically Dr. von Baerensprung's attitude toward Rolfe. Don't you see, Miss Dale, how destructive it is? No child can go on crying when it is urged to cry, no one can laugh at command. To see one's own no-'countness so cleverly analyzed is to lose all comfort in it. In a little more than a month Dr. von Baerensprung would have had me at some sort of work myself. As I am the stronghold of the whole loaferdom of the Rolfe plateau, my defection might have shaken our society to its very foundations. I declare, charming as I have found him, I am mighty glad he has gone."

"Your parting words to Dr. von Baerensprung were not very frank," I observed.

"Frankness," he returned, with a shadowy smile, "is not among my vices."

. . . . . .

The Baumanns sorely missed their genial visitor. The children were less indulged, Mr. Baumann less diverted from his business annoyances, and altogether the Kaffeetisch was less cheerful than it had been before. I came

regularly, as usual, secure in the belief that Mrs. Baumann, undemonstrative as she was, was glad to have me; but there was no great pleasure in the occasions when Mr. Baumann dilated upon the misfortune of living in Rolfe. A good share of the abuse that he was wont to heap upon Mr. Peyton-Call now fell upon Colonel Fanton. The latter's greed and cunning, it appeared, were quite as characteristic of the county as the former's indifference to business matters.

Mrs. Baumann and I both kept still during these tirades; I took my clew from the wife, though, indeed, I was ready enough to defy the husband. All he said of Fanton's greed and Peyton-Call's obstinacy might be true; but to take these as a daily text to inveigh against my native county was a little hard to bear.

"Yes, I know what defiance you are swallowing there, Miss Cassandra," said my host one day, with unexpected astuteness. "You must keep your eyes lowered if you really want to pretend you hear me coolly. But you are the very person I am talking to. You need to have your eyes opened as to matters here in Rolfe. You have the power to go away and to take all your brothers with you and yet you delight in staying here and letting them acquire land and settle. Even Archer, I hear, has had to promise to come back."

"I don't understand, Mr. Baumann," I answered him. "How have I the power to go away or to take my brothers?"

"Well, you are rich, you can play any game you like with your life——"

"I am not rich. How can I be rich?"

"But it is told everywhere——"

"People are mistaken."

"Your foster-mother——"

"She left me a fortune under conditions I could not fulfil, and I renounced it."

I had meant to keep this declaration in reserve till it was true in letter as it was in spirit. But I reflected that these people had been particularly kind to me and I felt I owed them a little confidence. I continued my explanation.

"I came to Rolfe with only a few hundred dollars, which in New York I should have regarded as pocket-money, but which seems to have gone far down here in the way of improving our little establishment. It will all be gone before long, and I shall depend entirely on my teaching and on my brothers' support."

"Well, I confess you surprise me," said Mr. Baumann, with a puzzled look; "but this is only recently, isn't it? When you first came here you were interesting yourself in land investments——"

I smilingly shook my head.

"I certainly received the impression," Mr. Baumann said, in a tone of defending himself, "that you were interested in the reforestration scheme of the Doctor's——"

"I was interested; but only in the people who were to be benefited. I tried to tell you I was not a capitalist come South to invest money."

"I knew your primary interest was in your family. I thought this would be your way of benefiting them. You seemed to care for the county so much."

"I do. I wish I had money to spend here. I have positively none."

Mr. Baumann laughed a little bitterly.

"Well, it was in order to get ahead of you that I was in such a hurry to go into the enterprise myself, and that's the reason I began with Fanton before Peyton-Call got back to Rolfe," he explained. "So now I am punished for my avarice by being in this scrape. Well, I am glad I did not go to the length of asking you for a loan to help me out."

"I sincerely wish I could help you. If there were any way in the world——"

"There's no way, since you haven't the capital, Miss Cassandra; unless, perhaps, you could persuade Peyton-Call to change his mind and sell me the mill."

"Of course, I couldn't do that," I said, quickly and coldly.

"Of course, I know you couldn't; I made a joke," he returned, rather curtly. It was plain that he believed I could had I wanted to, and I felt my blood rising. With forced composure I changed the subject.

From that hour I felt a dislike for Mr. Baumann's company, and avoided meeting him; but it was hard to go to the house without seeing its master, and so, as Archer had predicted, the Baumanns became of less social value to me. Almost imperceptibly our intimacy waned.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOUSE AND THE NAME

It was the day before Christmas and I was spending my time rather wearily and anxiously with Lena alone. Bud had been all of every day and some whole nights at the Court-house that week. I knew he was both playing and drinking—Lilbud admitted so much when he came home late in the afternoon, having himself indulged to an unusual extent in social relaxation.

"He ain't gettin' what you might call regular Christmas drunk, Sis' Cassy," Lilbud reassured me. "'Tain't worth while for you to worry yourself. He's just havin' a little fun with the money Bob Kirkwin paid him over for curing his mare of r'arin' in harness."

After supper Mr. Peyton-Call came in, looking very cool and steady-eyed for a man who was supposed to be leading the Christmas revels at the Court-house.

"Where is Bud?" I asked him.

"If Bud were only my brother," he returned, with a shadowy smile, "I could aptly inquire, am I his keeper?"

"If he does not behave himself sensibly, it is on your head," I answered, severely. "It is you who have made a society man of him."

"That's a pretty grave charge; if you will let me set forth the mitigating circumstances——"

"I would rather have you go to the Court-house and send Bud home to me."

"He's not at the Court-house, he's with Virgie," said Mr. Peyton-Call, serenely. "Quite as sober as any of the young men in the party. They have got up an impromptu dance for to-night, my cousin and Miss Dyer and Blair Lathrop. I am the bearer of an invitation to yourself to attend. Here is Virgie's note."

I shook my head even before I opened and read the missive, scribbled in pencil on a bit of paper.

"Honey-Sweetness," Virgie addressed me. "Come along with Don for a night full of fun. We are going to dance and have a supper, and they are all nice people and I have three chaperon's" (the last two words she had underlined three times), "so that it will suit your New York notions. Don't disappoint me; I won't enjoy myself a minute till I see you." (Signed) "Virgie."

"How did Bud happen to go to a dance of Miss Fanton's and Miss Dyer's?" I asked, with distress.

"Miss Fanton took particular pains to invite

him. Am I to have the pleasure of escorting you, Miss Dale?"

"No, I thank you," I returned, decidedly. "But if you can persuade Bud to come home, Mr. Peyton-Call, you will be doing him and me a great service."

"Unless you go with me I can't see Bud myself," he returned, in a regretful tone. "I am under command not to show myself except as your escort. But I shall take great pains to send any message you may have for Bud by someone who is not banished from Virgie's dance."

"Oh, there is no use in that," I returned, coldly, very much provoked at his facile evasion.

"Then there is no way in which I can serve you?" he inquired, with an air of chagrin. "And it is very plain that you are troubled."

"You must know why and how I am troubled," I exclaimed.

"I thought it was because you feared Virgie would be inconsiderate of Bud's right to his own sanity, as is her way with men at times," he returned.

"Yes, that's it," I said, not without surprise to find myself talking on this subject with him of all others. "Bud is so foolish already; and Virgie doesn't care. It amuses her."

"There is just one thing to do," he said, in a tone grown suddenly as serious as my own,

"and that is for you to come with me and take control of this dance and of your brother and your thoughtless friend. You know very well how proud Bud will be of your appearance, and you can absorb his attention. And if Virgie wants to divert him, you are intimate enough with her to interrupt her. Come, your presence at this dance is positively necessary. A fourth chaperon is needed."

There seemed good sense in this, and Mr. Peyton-Call's manner was quite novel in its sincerity. I still demurred.

"Perhaps I could persuade Bud to come home," I said, half to myself. "He is always so sweet and docile."

"Perhaps you can," he said, encouragingly. "It is worth a trial."

"I hate to appear at a party here, however informal," I continued, frowning a little.

"But Virgie assures you they are nice people," said he. "She read her note to me."

"Virgie isn't nearly particular enough of her company to suit my ideas," I returned, with a rather sad laugh. "She seems to have a liking for poor-whites."

He winced a little at the word, and then laughed as if at himself.

"Take me as authority, then," he suggested, with some bravado. "Surely I am aristocratic enough to be trusted."

"It's possible," I returned, dryly.

"Do you want my pedigree?" he asked, with a touch of mockery, "or any proof that my blood is deep indigo in color? I am a competent judge of who is socially correct; and I assure you no one is invited to this dance who doesn't claim to be of a first family. There are a few men in any gathering who unfortunately get drunk before the evening is over, but their names are all right."

"I can't go," I ejaculated. "But I will send a special message to Virgie, and she will leave Bud alone."

"And Bud will then console himself in a way you would hardly approve," he returned, inexorably. "Miss Dale, your going to this dance is one of the hardships of your self-chosen Rolfe career. You should brace your courage to face it."

Reluctantly I went to my room to make a change in my dress, and then said good-night to Lena and Lilbud. They were so surprised that Sister should be going to a party that I was all the more out of humor with the situation.

Mr. Peyton-Call laughed as he took my cloak to put it about me, and asked whether I had ever thought, in New York, that I should don this garment in a log-cabin.

"It's inappropriate," I admitted, and continued with intention, "but my personal things

being the only property I could call my own, I naturally brought them all with me when I came home to stay."

"I suppose that so long as you have such a cloak as this to wrap about you you don't feel the whole bitterness of your present poverty," he suggested.

His tone was unmistakably sarcastic; but why should he be sarcastic? He could not know that I was misrepresenting things, that the wretched business in New York still dragged on, and I was still legally the heiress.

"I am not poor now, of course," I said, with a careless air, "but shall be, shortly."

His eyes narrowed in characteristic fashion; for a moment we regarded each other watchfully.

"You are not poor now, but you will be shortly?" he repeated, slowly. "This is of fascinating interest, because of its mystery."

"No mystery," I said, quietly. "I am not poor now, because I've just drawn my teacher's salary; but as the school is closed for the winter, I shall soon be without resources."

He looked baffled; but laughed out, nevertheless.

"Rather than have you come upon the county," he assured me, "I'll let Baumann's proposed appropriation for another school-term pass."

"I shall appreciate that with heartfelt gratitude," said I.

"You needn't," he returned, with venom. "I only do it to save myself trouble. I believe I am Commissioner of the Poor in Rolfe, and you would be my first and only pauper. We haven't any poor-house, and I should have to consider where I could put you."

I laughed this off, and we went out into the frosty, starlit night, to his buckboard.

"A pretty vehicle in which to take a belle to a dance!" he observed, as he helped me in. "If I'd had any warning I should have made ready the old coach-and-four, in which my mother used to attend the county functions in all state. It stands there in the Caxton carriage-house, under a heavy veil of dust, but still good for a grand occasion like the present."

"Grand occasion? It pleases you to mock me," I returned. "A poor, distracted girl is driving out into the black night to look for an erring elder brother. In no sense am I going to a dance; but where are you turning, Mr. Peyton-Call? Aren't we going to The Terraces?"

He had taken the road toward the Court-house as we left our place.

"The dance is to be at the biggest building they can find near the Court-house," he re-

turned, "and there are to be four fiddlers, and a French horn. You will be obliged to dance, moreover, however melancholy your mood and stern your errand. A girl who goes to a dance with me is not permitted any great amount of quiet."

"I don't dance," I returned, coldly.

"I will engage to teach you in a very few minutes," he answered, with firmness. "I also hope to cure you of the habit of fibbing, which, I observe with pain, is growing on you of late."

"The habit of fibbing!" I ejaculated. "Please bear out that statement immediately, Mr. Peyton-Call."

"They come to me," he said, affecting complaint, "with every sort of tale of privation and misery, all applying for relief from public funds—oh, what am I talking about? Excuse me, Miss Dale, for being absent-minded, I was thinking of one of my public offices. It's my duty to accuse people of misrepresenting their case, and then to take it back with an apology."

This certainly sounded as if he knew at least as much of my affairs as I did myself. Absurd thought! How, or where, and, above all, why should he have learned them?

"But I still accuse you of fraud in saying you don't dance," he continued.

"I used to," I said, moodily. "I've no mind

to do it again. Indeed, I don't feel festive to-night."

"But I do," he returned, with his accustomed amiability, and then we drove in silence in the fresh night wind.

The biggest building they had found near the Court-house proved to be Caxton. I felt considerable dismay when we turned in between the huge brick gate-posts and whirled up the drive. The great white house I had seen by glimpses from the road had repelled me strangely. I had been affected by Virgie's morbid attitude toward it, in the days when she still expected to be its mistress. And now to think that she had chosen to dance and frolic there, so soon after breaking troth with its master—! Should I ever learn to understand Virgie Fanton?

Besides, I was provoked with Peyton-Call, who had trickily evaded telling me the dance was at his own house. Plainly he knew I would have refused to go there upon any consideration. I could now make no objection without absurdity, and the situation did not improve my humor.

The house was alight in its lower floor, music floated forth to greet us, and the merry hum of voices. As Mr. Peyton-Call helped me from the carriage Virgie and a group of girls and men came out of the lighted doorway.

"Just in time for the german, you-all," cried some, and, "Well, Don, that took forever! Did you come by way of New Rome?" and, "Cassy, Honey-Sweetness, we're all waiting for you!" Bud's mellow voice sounded among the rest—"Here you are, Sister? That's right!"

I came slowly up the steps and shook hands with this one and that one, feeling no great heartiness.

"Yes, I've come. I could not well refuse your invitation, Virgie," I said, with forced cheerfulness. "You were not to enjoy a moment till I arrived, you know."

"No more she has," put in Bud. "Looks like she was watching for you every moment."

"Tell you for a fact, Miss Cassandra," said the animated Blair Lathrop, "you'll have to stay here till noon to-morrow morning to make up to us the time we've lost waiting for you. Miss Virgie wouldn't let us have the german till you got here."

"Well, let the fun begin now," I suggested, rather ironically.

"You don't need to go to the dressing-room. Dearest, you look scrumptious," cried Virgie, gayly, dragging my cloak from my shoulders as we stepped into the lighted hall. "Here, Don, take Cassy's cape. Mind you don't lay it in any of your hundred-year-old dust. I declare, Cassy, we found this house in a scandal-

ous state. These lovely rooms haven't been opened for months. But we got all the darkies on the place in here to dust the floors, and light the candles and hang the greens, and we all helped, and we had the ball-rooms ready in half an hour. Doesn't everything look fine?"

I glanced about the stately rooms to the right and left of the hall, the dark woodwork and polished floors illuminated by scores of candles.

"It must have looked like this," Virgie whispered to me, "the night she danced herself to death. Do you think we shall see her ghost to-night?"

"Oh, Virgie, don't speak of it!" I implored her, with a little shudder.

There were many more people present than I had expected. In their ardor to get a crowd together the committee had not been as particular, I thought, as Virgie had wanted me to believe, and I noted some present who had probably not often seen the inside of Caxton. It actually relieved me to find the company so mixed, for it gave Bud far less distinction. There was Buck Lanier, as thorough a young tough as ever was countenanced by respectable people, who had laid his tobacco-chewing and profanity aside and donned a scarlet necktie to do honor to Virgie's impromptu dance; there were the Misses Tripp, three simpering

damsels in astonishing toilettes, whose father kept the "hotel" at the Court-house, and whose mother was as poor-white as any Dale in Rolfe. In contrast to these were the high-bred and high-spirited Miss Dyer and her sister, Mrs. Blaylock, the latter one of Virgie's three chaperons. There was Miss Lucy Call herself, countenancing the affair with her own acrid air of propriety. I had no definite cause for disapproval of the party.

And now I was beset with invitations to dance. Virgie was introducing one man after another to me. We were the centre of a large group in the hall. The music had begun merrily in the great drawing-room.

"I reckon I'll have to have the first dance myself, Sister," said Bud, genially. He had taken his stand beside me and beamed with delight at the attention I was receiving. "Looks like that's the only way to keep the peace."

"Go 'way from here, Bud, Miss Cassandra don't want to waste her time on you," cried one of the men, indignantly; and another protested that brothers had no rights that anyone else was bound to respect. But I took Bud's arm and together we circled away from the crowd, across the polished floor of Caxton hall.

I was surprised and pleased in spite of myself at Bud's good waltzing. The whole

swarm of young people had already resolved itself into dancing couples, and Bud steered me steadily and gracefully among them, making delighted comments himself on the style of my waltzing and my general appearance.

"I declare, Sister, you get sweeter every time I see you, I believe," he murmured, looking down at me with pride. "And you move like I don't know what kind of a feather. Blamed if you don't beat Miss Virgie dancing; she's the kind that most slides away from you."

"Have you been dancing with her, Bud?"

He assented, with a look of dreamy content.

"I'm tired, Bud," I said, when we passed into a smaller room, where we were alone and I sank into a chair. "Let's talk a little, Brother. I've missed you so these last days."

He stood before me and regarded me thoughtfully.

"Sister, this little table you're leaning your arm on is where I played that night and won us our home place," he said, with a slow smile. "Somehow I never thought to see you sitting here in Mr. Don's room."

I looked about me hurriedly; yes, this was Peyton-Call's study. The furniture had been moved against the walls by the floor committee in its ardor to get every possible inch of dancing room, and one or two chairs had been set upon the desk of the master of the house, with

little respect for the order of his things. And there, under the chair, I saw the work-basket of his mother which Dr. von Baerensprung had spoken of. The walls were lined with books, most of them with old and handsome bindings; there were a few gloomy engravings, and over the desk one glowing portrait in pastel of a very beautiful young woman in a low-cut gown.

"That's his mother," said Bud, when he saw me look at the portrait. "I reckon she was pretty nigh an angel, from the way he speaks of her. I certainly do love to hear Don talk about his mother. It looks like it does him so much good."

"Just about the same kind of good, Bud," said Peyton-Call, from the doorway, "as it seems to do you to talk about your sister."

He came in, smiling, and put his arm over Bud's shoulder; and so they stood before me in great repose.

"It's the truth," assented Bud, looking into my eyes. "I certainly do love to brag about you, Lil' Cassy. Looks like when I come up here to Caxton and see everything so fine and grand I'd get green with jealousy of Don unless I had you at home to make our old ramshackle place as good as any Caxton."

Bud had always called our landlord Mr. Don. Was the last step of his equality achieved?

"I have a very silly brother," I said to Mr. Peyton-Call, with an effort at lightness.

"There's no good reason why a brother should be exempt," he returned, with a veiled look. "But if a brother's pretty speeches are going to turn your head, so that you commit another such flaring injustice toward me as dancing away like that, I shall take measures to have him turned out."

"You've turned me out of Caxton several times, Don, but that was when you were giving the party," said Bud, with a good-humored laugh. "To-night I'm here with Miss Virgie, and she's the only one who can send me home."

"She was asking for you a minute ago, Bud," he began in a casual tone. Instantly Bud was aroused, his face flushed eagerly, and without so much as a word or look toward his adored sister he was out of the room and away.

"What do those young scamps mean by upsetting my room in this fashion, confound them!" exclaimed Mr. Peyton-Call, looking about him. He seized the chairs on the desk, and swung them back upon the floor. "They're taking my invitation to make themselves at home a bit too literally. I have a bachelor's hatred of a commotion, Miss Dale." He dragged forward a leather couch, and threw a bear-skin rug to its place on the floor. "They

can come in here to flirt, but hanged if I let them dance in here," he continued, with an injured air. "They'll raise a dust that will choke me for months."

His preoccupation with the order of his room was all affected. He knew very well I had risen angrily when he had sent Bud after Virgie, and now he turned to me with a changed air.

"Well," he said, in a humble tone. "I have failed to please you, have I?"

"You puzzle me greatly, Mr. Peyton-Call. I am here to keep Bud away from Virgie, and you thwart me."

"That's revenge," he explained. "You had no right to dance away with Bud while I was carrying your cloak to a place of safety. If you'll make up your injustice now, I'll help you play dragon for the rest of the night. If you refuse me my rights, I'll torment you in every possible manner. Now as to my rights, the waltzes are all mine and the german is mine; and when they play those jiggy marches, as at this moment, I say it is your duty and your interest to sit still and talk to me. Unless I am appeased, Miss Dale, there is no hope for the success of your mission to-night. I shall see that you don't lay eyes on either Bud or Virgie for the whole of the evening."

"So these are your true colors!" I exclaimed,

between indignation and involuntary laughter. "Well, Mr. Peyton-Call, if I find I need your help in the course of the evening, I'll consider the matter of appeasing you. Just now I really haven't time;" and I was moving to the door to follow Bud.

"One moment, Miss Dale," he begged, in another tone. "I want to show you a likeness of my mother."

I came back toward the desk, reluctantly.

"It is a very beautiful portrait," I said; but in truth it gave me only pain to look at it. Virgie's accounts of the late Mrs. Peyton-Call were all too vivid, and my knowledge that the son adored the mother whom others would not respect made it doubly hard to play the part of admiration.

"I have a miniature here that is better—really a fine piece of work, they tell me," he said, opening a drawer of his desk. "Have you ever interested yourself in miniatures, Miss Dale?"

The question provoked me. It was another one of his unwarranted references to the conditions of my past life.

"You don't require a knowledge of art, I hope, of the teachers of your district school?" I inquired.

"We've had some who were not qualified, I suppose," he returned, "though really, I'm not

sure. I never got around to my duty of school-inspection until you held the position."

My temper rose and I was about to express myself once for all on the subject of his school inspectorship; but he met my look with one of such appeal, and he handed me the miniature case so hastily, I refrained and bent my flushed face over his mother's likeness.

She had been a daring, petulant beauty; her flaming red hair and her meeting brows bespoke her temperament. I could appreciate, though with involuntary concern, the delicacy with which the artist had done his work; depicting his model's faults with uncompromising fidelity; showing her hard, eager greed for pleasure, and her contempt for her fellow-beings; yet showing, too, how brilliant and keen and full of life she was.

And now I looked up at the pastel again to wonder how I could have found it for a moment interesting. It was a portrait as one sees a hundred, photographically perfect. Yet not a hint of passion or pride in the lovely features; not a suggestion of all that the miniature darkly declared.

"Which is the better likeness?" I asked Mr. Peyton-Call, a little faintly.

"This!" he declared, and he held out his hand for the miniature. I was almost startled;

and yet, when I looked at his impassive face, I told myself that my imagination had been too active. The miniature, of course, did not tell the same story to the devoted son that it told to the cold and prejudiced stranger.

"So far as my recollections go, the other would be as good," he added, quietly, his eyes on the picture in his hand. "I know my mother only through these counterfeits; my childish recollections of her are very vague. For some reason," he glanced at my face and then looked down again. "For some reason my father did not like this miniature and it was put away. I have only recently resurrected it; but people who knew her assure me it is a wonderful likeness. This other portrait," he looked up at it and smiled rather sadly, "has been with me at school and college. I have been brought up like you, Miss Dale, among strangers, and had an ideal, a dream of memory to cherish like yourself. You remembered Bud's face, you told me once; I brooded over my mother's likeness; and we were both drawn home to Rolfe—for good or ill."

"For ill, in my case," I exclaimed, rousing myself; "unless I find Bud now and persuade him to come home."

"You won't do that," he said, and as he closed the desk drawer on the miniature. "And

yet I'll engage to show you made no mistake in coming back to us."

"Show me that I have made no mistake in trusting you and Virgie," I said by way of appeal. "Come with me now and help me."

"To the ends of the earth——"

"Only as far as Bud!"

He followed me into the hall. I looked among the dancing couples, among the groups of seated people. I asked Miss Lucy Call, I asked the group of girls and men on the stairs. I looked in the long piazzas front and back; and even into the dining-room where the committee were spreading out the supper. I could not find Virgie. And Bud, whom I was careful not to mention in my questions, had also disappeared.

"You are too serious," protested Mr. Peyton-Call, keeping beside me.

"That's a very grave charge," I returned, pausing. We stood in a doorway, from where I surveyed a line of rooms.

"I don't want you to stop," he said. "I like to have you see my house while it is all festively lighted and decked."

"It's a beautiful house," I said, wearily. "I wish it were a little smaller."

"I wish it were only one log-cabin room," said he. "Perhaps I shouldn't be so lonely in it."

"And perhaps you wouldn't be able to make other people so much trouble with it," I added, still looking down the vista of rooms hoping Virgie would appear among the dancers.

"It isn't my fault they come here to dance and flirt," he said, aggrievedly. "I'm a quiet man myself. I didn't invite them; I invited no one but you."

"I think you missed the point of my remark," I said, with frigid mien.

"I hope you didn't miss the point of mine," he returned, affecting anxiety; and when I would not respond to this challenge he continued, more seriously: "I am in earnest. I don't like to see my house filled with merry, careless people. It seems inappropriate in these rooms, usually so gloomy and quiet. I should like to close them forever in memory of my poor young mother's last gayeties."

I felt the pathos of this, and for once answered him sympathetically.

"You should close them. You should go away."

He smiled and shook his head.

"I'm chained to the duty of keeping this house," he said. "My forebears left it to me and me to it. They built it as great and fine as they knew how, they filled it with everything they believed valuable and beautiful through

several generations; and then, as if by fate, the other branches of the family died out and the whole inheritance was concentrated upon me. I now class myself as of equal importance with the columns that hold up my piazza roof, and feel that in my quiet way I, too, am useful."

I shook my head in disapproval.

"If I were to leave Rolfe I couldn't keep my house," he continued, calmly. "It's only by staying on the spot that I can ward off the sheriff a while longer; by dint of giving it my sole attention I am able to prolong the fight; my debts are slowly but surely undermining me, and great will be the fall of Caxton."

"And is it worth a whole life," I asked, grave in spite of myself, "to postpone such an end?"

"To postpone this end is the last chance of my life," he returned, with a curious look. "When my house is gone, all outward and visible signs that there was ever any good in the Peyton-Calls will have vanished. I, the last of them, am only a saddened and inefficient dreamer. And if ever I dared," he continued in a lowered tone and slowly, "to ask a woman to love me, it is to these outward and visible signs that I must point; whatever my own shortcomings, my house and my name are worthy."

"It is a good thing you can feel so," I answered him, steadily. "Family pride must make for right action. If Virgie felt as you

do, poor Bud would not be here to-night; and I should not be here."

"And if you were not here," he declared, with a certain heat, "I should not be trying to feign a pride in my ancestry. I should be alone, expiating their follies and their sins. You being here, I make this poor attempt to impress you. But you are thinking only of Bud's absurd little tragedy; and I am reduced to stage-setting once more."

"At least you make a good setting for tragedy with your sombre air," I suggested, not in the least liking this new phase in his attempts at flirtation.

"I fear you mean to flatter me," he said, with all his flippancy comfortably restored.

"What are you all wandering around like this for?" demanded Blair Lathrop, joining us in the doorway. "Looks like one sees you in every room at once."

"I am looking for Virgie," I explained. "I must see her."

"Why don't you apply to me instead of trusting a no-'count, uninventive man like Don here?" he demanded. "I'll produce Miss Virgie in three seconds by starting the music for the german. She'll hear that in the remotest part of the garden."

He was off across the floor toward the musicians.

"Now is your chance to learn to dance, Miss Dale," proposed Mr. Peyton-Call, amiably. I shook my head and went across the room to Miss Lucy Call to sit down beside her on the sofa. He came and stood before us.

"Have you found Virgie yet?" Miss Call asked me, sympathetically. "What do you want of her, Miss Cassandra?"

That was precisely what I could not tell the lady. I made a poor evasion and kept looking eagerly toward the head of the room where the dancers were forming.

"There is Virgie now," said Miss Call. "Coming in from the piazza. And isn't that your brother with her, Miss Cassandra?"

Mr. Peyton-Call sat down on the other side of me.

"Do you see how things are going?" he asked in a low voice. "The german is forming, Bud and Virgie will join it as partners. Now I'll bargain with you, Miss Dale. I'll engage to make Virgie dance with someone else, if you will dance with me."

"Oh, hurry," I exclaimed, impatiently.

He promptly left me, and I watched with mingled anxiety and amusement his manœuvres with the young people at the other end of the room. First he spoke aside to Bud, and Bud dove away into the piazza as if gone to fetch something. I noticed that Virgie looked after

him. Then the master of Caxton interfered with Blair Lathrop's arrangement of the line. Blair appeared to expostulate. Virgie presently took up the matter, and was apparently flinging her orders about, waving her little white hand disdainfully. The music played gayly throughout, the other dancers impatiently beat time, some of them broke ranks and whirled away in a waltz till the leaders should settle their difficulties.

"What are you-all fussing about up there?" Miss Lucy Call demanded of two that passed us. "Why don't you begin?"

They stopped and joined us.

"Don is on his high horse; he's teasing them all," explained the girl, laughing.

"It's just wasting time," growled the young man.

And now the ranks that had formed at the head of the room were entirely dispersed, and Virgie and the two men stood there alone, still apparently discussing the question. Presently Mr. Peyton-Call turned away and left them with an air of telling them to have it their own way. Blair Lathrop clapped his hands and the music stopped; and he made a speech to the expectant young people who were pausing in groups of two throughout the room.

"All of you-all listen!" cried Blair. "Miss Virgie and I are going to lead one german in

the good old-fashioned way, without any innovations; and your host of Caxton is going to lead another, with the most preposterous figures and formation that mortal man has ever proposed. He's going to have his out on the lawn; so whoever wants to join him, please go along and get out of our way. Now, Uncle Lindon, give us that music from the beginning again, will you?"

A burst of merriment from the crowd, a burst of music, and the german was finally begun. Mr. Peyton-Call made his way back to me, laughter in his eyes.

"And Bud?" I inquired.

"I sent him to ascertain whether Buck Lanier was sober enough to join the dance," he returned in a low voice, "rather relying on the contrary. Bud is probably at present engaged in leading him home. It will be the first time in all the years of his life that Buck Lanier has made himself really useful. He will engage your brother at least an hour; and that hour, Miss Dale, you will devote to me. First we will dance."

I politely declined. I liked to watch the others. He sat down and affected great airs of disappointment. Miss Lucy Call was no use to me; she would watch the dancing; she would not talk to me; and I had to parry Mr. Peyton-Call's skilful attacks upon the firmness of my

purpose. He pleaded and teased and threatened; and I was in too good-humor with him for the way he had taken care of Bud, and remained gracious. But we were conspicuous there, the only seated figures on that side of the room. As the dancers swept by they merrily called to us to join in; they accused Mr. Peyton-Call of the sulks because his scheme for the german had fallen through; they accused me of not knowing a good floor and good music when I saw it; they finally accused us both of being entirely too much absorbed in conversation. Thus taunted and tempted at once, I presently consented to dance.

The next moment I was caught in the delight of it, and never had another scruple until it was all over. The Rolfe County young people danced with spirit and precision. In and out of the maze of figures, promenading, circling, changing partners, all went off with a swing and a perfection that spoke of long and devoted practice. And when the musicians struck up "Dixie," a very shout arose from them all; they caught up the air, singing and whistling, and where there had been spirit before there was now the abandon of romping children.

"Hooray! Hooray!
Away down South in Dixie!"

they sang around me, eyes flashing, hands clapping—a merry, metrical din.

"Ole Missus married Bill, de weaber,
William was a gay deceiber,"

hummed Virgie beside me; and

"Look away! Look away!"

roared the chorus,

"Look away down South in Dixie!"

It was the first time I had ever really heard my national air. It fairly carried me away—I sang with the rest.

"Do you take your stand in Dixie land, and live and die here?" my partner murmured, and I laughed in assent.

In truth, there is no tune like it to stir the blood. It carries us out into the sunny, broad streets. When it begins with

"Dixie land is the land of cotton,"

something is coming at a lively, quick step; with a dash and a clang and a cheer, it has arrived! We are out in the broad, sunny streets with the marching crowd, the fife pierces us with reckless joy.

"Away! Away! Away down South in Dixie!"

And we are whirled about among the excited, cheering people, then getting our breath at the

outskirts of the crowd and catching sight of the rustling live-oaks and sound of the chorus of a thousand mocking-birds. They, too, are singing Dixie as if their throats would split. Sunlight and wind and the crowd are now dancing to it with a good double-shuffle, jolly blacks in the lead, white boys and girls following them with merry imitation, each and all beating syncopation with the nonchalance that is the despair of the unrhythmical. There is still something coming, something dashing and brilliant beyond words; to see it we are content to be swayed in the crowded streets or to lean perilously over window-sills and balconies. Now the cheers are continuous, for here they are, the Dixie boys, tramping defiantly, their bright eyes roaming to the right and left under the shade of their large gray hats. The people cheer madly, and sing in a very transport. Up to the heights of recklessness, on to the brink of danger, down to the springs of passion—where will the merry maddening tune not lead the boys of Dixie?

Hear the Philistine little toot of "Yankee Doodle." Thin, rapid, jarring, pounding, it crashes its way through our melody—no height or depth here, no swing or fervor! It is a finite, futile little tune, concerning itself only with getting its hero to town on his rough-trotting pony, his feather quivering nervously

as he jolts along. That accomplished, the tune is dead—has fairly extinguished itself. Not so with "Dixie," instinct with love or life; for scarcely is it ended, the sweet long emphasis on "South" still sounding, when one hears the roll and the tramp of the first part returning, and one begins again with "land of cotton":

"Ole times dyar am not forgotten—"

Suddenly the music stopped. We were in the midst of a figure. Blair Lathrop's voice once more resounded through the hall, addressing us all.

"We're one lady short!" he cried. "Let every man secure his own original partner and let's see who is missing."

Alas! it proved to be his own partner who was missing. And I saw Buck Lanier's scarlet neck-tie, like a danger signal, far at the other end of the room; so Bud was not with him.

"My own original partner, may I bring you some supper?" Mr. Peyton-Call asked me.

"No," I answered, quite discouraged. "You may take me home."

CHAPTER XVII

MR. PEYTON-CALL HAS TACT

It was an inauspicious event for the new year that I quarrelled with Virgie on its morning. Poor Bud for the first time had spoken to me of her favor, had shown me in his exultation a ribbon she had given him at the dance. In vain I had warned him, urged him not to be deceived. He showed resentment and dismay at my manner of receiving his confidence. When he left me after our first misunderstanding, I broke down in tears. Virgie found me so when she came in to bring me some New Year's cakes of her own baking; and very comical was her amazement to see me with streaming eyes. There was questioning, coaxing, entreating. Virgie was bound to know what had come over her Honey-Sweetness. Finally I grew calm enough to speak to her on the subject nearest my heart.

"It is you who are tormenting me, Virgie, because you are cruelly playing with Bud," I told her.

"Foolishness!" she exclaimed, lightly. "It

isn't cruel, I suppose, to flatter a man a little. They like it."

"Virgie, he doesn't understand you; he is taking it seriously," I urged.

"Nonsense! Nothing in the world but foolishness," she repeated. "Nobody takes me seriously. Nobody but a Yankee like you would dream of taking me seriously."

"I'm not a Yankee," I returned, wrathfully.

"Then, as Mammy would say, you ain't bright," she replied, with a malicious smile. "Only Yankees or insane people would think I mean anything when I flirt a little."

"I don't care what you mean, I care what Bud thinks," said I, "—and I know he thinks impossible things just now. And I want you to drop him before you utterly break his heart."

"Tell you for a fact, Pudd'n' Pie, I'm getting that used to Bud's devotion I wouldn't miss it for anything in this world," she said, with engaging frankness. "You must admit that he's mighty good-looking."

"Virgie, have you no conscience?"

"Not the least bit in the world! Never had any! Don't want any. It makes people mighty tiresome——"

"Virgie, you are always kind. You never hurt people willingly. Only in this one way you think that suffering doesn't matter."

"Well, I reckon it doesn't matter much," she

returned, carelessly. "I reckon it won't hurt Bud to sigh a little. Think of the poor girls that are probably in love with his black eyes right now. I aim to go for the handsome men, Cassy, and bring them low; because they're always vain, and usually flirts themselves, and so I revenge the other girls."

"Bud isn't like that," I said, indignantly. "He is perfectly honest and gentle and simple. If he heard you talk this way he wouldn't understand you."

"I talk in a different way to him," she answered, with an incomprehensible look. "I'm right curious when I'm with Bud."

Then I really grew stern and bade her choose between Bud and me; and as she very promptly left me, it appeared the choice was not difficult to make.

For a few days I was too angry with Virgie to miss her company; she was on my mind night and day. Then I began to discover what great changes had come into my life in consequence of my break with her. I found myself looking for her coming hour after hour; I found myself feeling her absence with unreasonable pain.

And Bud, my loving, gentle brother, had grown shy and cold with me. I had no access to his confidence, no opportunity to regain it. He was hurt to the depths at the wrong he felt

I had done Virgie. Slow to wrath, Bud was as slow to forgive. From now on he was more away from home than ever.

Whether chiefly through Baumann or through Peyton-Call, the appropriation to continue the school till spring had been made, and I had at least the solace of outside work when I grew too unhappy over my separation from Bud. But for weeks my only happy hours were over Archer's letters.

As I had expected, the Remans had received him with great kindness. It seemed as if they could not do enough for him. All the time he was not engaged in "lifting encyclopedias" for Dr. von Baerensprung he was seeing New York with his "new cousins" and making warm friends, it seemed, of the whole family. He was fairly intoxicated over all he saw and heard. I laughed till I cried over some of his naïve accounts to me as to how they lived in New York.

Meanwhile I had the added satisfaction of a running comment on Archer's rapid development in letters from Mr. Henry Reman as well as from Dr. von Baerensprung. My "little brother" was growing in sense and bearing every day. His employer regretted that his use for Archer would end with the month of January; he should have liked to keep

him with him indefinitely. Mr. Henry Reman also seemed to find Archer companionable, was impressed with his astuteness, hinted of having work for him himself.

Archer asked in every letter about Bud and sent him messages. I always read the letters aloud to the whole family. Bud sometimes listened with attention and evident pleasure, but more often he was distracted and self-absorbed. The poor fellow's thoughts were running in an ever-narrowing channel. The next fox-hunt and the next church service were alike eagerly anticipated, for nothing had significance except the sight of Virgie.

At the end of January, on as bright and mild a day as the sunny South affords, Bud came from the Court-house in the middle of the morning with a letter packet to me so unusually large that he took it to be something of importance. And so it proved, indeed. The contents were letters and enclosures from Mr. Reman and Archer, part of them of most pleasant content and part of them of intensely vexatious import. For the first and pleasant piece of news I learned that Mr. Reman had decided to educate Archer and to employ him. Here was a cause for great rejoicing and Archer's half-homesick, half-jubilant letter to me and Bud in which he went through the form of asking our

advice, was a very touching bit of reading. But I had no pleasure in my brother's affairs that day, for the other letters and enclosures too closely concerned me; or rather, not me at all, but my neighbor, Peyton-Call.

To my disgust and mortification it was proved to me beyond a shadow of doubt that my one flash of suspicion in regard to his interest in me had been well-founded. He had investigated for himself the legal status of my private affairs; he had inquired minutely into the question whether at any stage I could check the proceedings I had launched myself and change my mind about renouncing Mrs. Reman's legacy. He and his lawyers had attempted to gain their information without attracting any notice; chance had put Mr. Reman, who represented my foster-mother's legal heirs, upon the track of the adventurer, and chance had led him to mention the matter to Archer, who since he had been in New York had learned all my story. My astute younger brother, stimulated by his mistrust and dislike of Peyton-Call, had promptly supplied data for the identification of the unknown adventurer and also a full explanation of his motives. Now I had the doubtful satisfaction of such proofs of friendship as Mr. Reman's letter afforded.

"My dear Cassandra," he wrote, "the en-

closures from our lawyers speak for themselves. I only want to add, by way of apology for troubling you with this disgusting business, that we, your warm friends, feel justified in showing some anxiety in your behalf. That you have thrown aside our name, that you are still refusing to let us help you except in this slight assistance to your fine young brother, all this does not prevent our regarding ourselves as your natural protectors. You are so absolutely unworldly, so impulsive in your affections, that you are just the kind of girl to be deceived by the low cunning of others. Archer has told me enough about this man Peyton-Call for me to realize that his cupidity may be very profoundly concealed. That sort of man may be really dangerous. I suppose it hurts your pride to have me imply he could be dangerous to you. I am sure that by this time you are relieved from the impertinence of his attentions, as the matter that interests him is now settled at last. You will see by the enclosures from your attorney that the last step is complete of that act which puts us under lifelong obligation to you. Though this mercenary schemer is settled, you still should understand the situation so that his withdrawal may not puzzle you."

I was perhaps as grateful for this letter as any other girl would have been; as for an ab-

surd effusion from Archer, written in similar tone, angry as I was it made me laugh. I replied to his letter with more art than honesty, affecting a high disdain of their tempest in a tea-pot.

"I am surprised you should be wasting your time, so valuable for study just now, over these matters which do not concern you," I wrote my brother. "Remember, dear, others are paying for your tuition and you owe them your best application. As for Mr. Peyton-Call's attitude toward me, your letters have made me no great revelation. I've had to do with that kind of man before, and long ago I understood our neighbor of Caxton. The situation is not as tragic as it appears to your inexperience. It does not touch my dignity or my honor in the least. We should feel only pity for the poor fellow who is ready for any desperate means to save his house. Some day you will be more charitable toward the underdogs in the fight of life; for people whose whole inheritance is bad, materially and spiritually. The wonder with this man is, not that he has mean impulses, but where he gets so many nobler traits. He presents some of the finest flowers of virtue in the perfection of his courtesies, his self-command, his temperance in the midst of temptations, and above all in his sincere devotion to an ideal. A man

who adores the memory of his mother as he does is not wholly bad, you know.

"Now please drop this subject altogether and attend to your work. Give me a more complete account of your daily duties; we are deeply interested in every word you write about yourself."

Having finished this bit of composition with frowning brow and close-set lips, I walked my room to get control over my agitation. Shame and scorn and indignation swept over me in waves. I recalled every hint I had received from Peyton-Call himself as to where his interest lay. In truth, he seemed scarcely to have taken the trouble to be cautious. His inquiry concerning my age, his direct question the morning we were riding, his gibes at my pretence of poverty on Christmas night, and on that night his frank avowal to me of his debts and the dedication of his life to preserve his house—all this had been boldly plain. It looked as though he had half scorned to dissemble. Even in his relation to Virgie, so far as I had observed, he had made no serious pretence of love. She, too, had been chosen in cool calculation, relinquished again without regret when he had something better in view. Insufferable effrontery!

But though I raged awhile, I was not hard hit, and presently I could congratulate myself

on the elasticity of my humor. My kind cousin's characterization of me as unworldly, impulsively affectionate, requiring warning against designing men, was really quite as mirth-provoking as poor Archer's excited little letter; and my own feeling defence of Peyton-Call, when I re-read it, seemed the most screamingly funny of the whole collection.

After I was sufficiently cooled I went to Bud with the first and pleasant part of my mail and read him the letters.

"What do you think about Archer's staying in New York?" I asked him.

"You know what's right, Sister," he returned, moodily.

"It is right he should stay where he can make the most of himself," I answered, with decision.

"All right, Sister, you write him he must stay. He's your boy now, and you have the say-so about him. He used to be my boy. It's right lonely home without him."

Wrought up as I was, Bud's words hurt me cruelly. I walked away out under the oaks and down to the spring, battling with tears. The sun was at noon, the winter day was balmy as in April. There were the joyous robins in the holly-trees, I had remembered since I was a child. Under that arbor of green and rubied branches I knelt down at the edge of

the sunken hogshead of the spring. I mirrored my face in the water as I had so often with Bud when we were little, and fell into a sad revery.

Quietly scrutinizing my face, I admitted to myself some bitter truths. My coming home had been a weary mistake, the good of it all elusive. Though I was a Dale, though the outline of my brow, the set of my mouth recalled so vividly the look of each of my three brothers, I was a stranger among them and out of place. Better have stayed in New York among my tiresome duties, in my false relations to the world, and at least have had a home to dream of as ideal! Here I only made trouble. Pain for Bud, mischief for Virgie, meanness for Peyton-Call had followed fast on my arrival. Wearily I bent still further over the clear round water mirror. My eyes looked back pathetically enough as if to ask—"Why should a poor girl blame herself for having been homesick and having come home?"

The stiff little holly-leaves snapped and crackled softly over my head, stirred in the passing air; a robin laughed mockingly above me. I was at heart a little child again, dreaming old dreams by the spring. Bud should have been beside me, his dark eyes looking up into mine from that cool depth——

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" came a voice, and there was a footfall behind me.

Then in the water mirror appeared the face of the master of Caxton. He had caught hold of a branch overhead and so bent over me. His reflection appeared ever so far below mine.

"Don't move," he begged.

I had no intention of moving. A heat had passed into my face which I feared to let him see lest he should not understand it aright. I counted on his not noticing it in the depths of the spring.

"On the contrary, I must ask you to move," I said to him, lightly and coldly. "You are disturbing me in some very serious reflections."

"I am sure I can help you," he returned with his accustomed ease of impudence. "I can witness quite as well as your fairy mirror that you are just as beautiful as when you came to Rolfe."

I thought to myself: "What? Hasn't the loss of my fortune detracted from my charm?" Aloud I affected a tone of chagrin. "I was anxiously looking for some improvement. I had great hopes of country air and a care-free life."

"We must devise some cares for you," he suggested. "Who is safe if you grow any more dazzling?"

Now I became a little cross. Why couldn't the man leave me alone when he was done with me?

"I must ask you to curb your tongue a little, Mr. Peyton-Call," I said. "Remember, you are no longer on your own land and you can be shown off the premises."

He laughed, dropped on his knee beside me, and bent far over the spring.

"Miss Dale, why have you been crying?" he demanded, with a sudden change of tone.

"There is no reason on the wide earth why I should tell you," I returned.

"Now, if I can give you a reason, will you tell me?"

"It would have to be a mighty good one."

I was half-consciously fascinated by the study of his face in the water. There seemed to be no embarrassment in our looking at each other through our reflection in the spring. It was the first time I had seen his face in the light of all I knew about his character. I wondered, half-idly, whether I could have read cunning and avarice in his features before I knew him.

"The reason why you should tell me is very good," he said, slowly. "I am your only friend in Rolfe. Virgie is in disgrace with you; you have frightened Bud out of your sight; you have sent away Archer, and you didn't keep Baerensprung; you have failed to cultivate Mrs. Lena. In short, I repeat, you haven't a friend besides me."

"Well, isn't that enough to make me cry?"

I asked, with a nervous attempt at humor; and then a sort of fury for experimentation possessed me and I continued, without much caution: "moreover, my trouble to-day is outside the pale of your sympathetic condolence. I've been vexed by the content of some letters from New York."

"About Archer, I suppose," he said, with a steady look that rather took me aback. I had expected him to flinch a little.

"From Archer," I returned, in a tone of assent. "And about—business."

"I believe you dislike business," he said, amiably, "about as much as I do."

"Rather more, I fancy," I returned, and I felt my color rising.

"Not more," he said. "I, too, have had letters by the Northern mail this morning—letters that take a whole weight of business from my shoulders. I feel an inexpressible relief. I wish from my heart"—he looked suddenly up from the water and faced me with a swift earnestness—"that you could share this relief."

I rose quickly to my feet, without accepting the proffer of his hand. The slight was marked—he set his lips as if in pain.

"Friends should be valued by their devotion," he began.

"Believe me, Mr. Peyton-Call," I cut in coldly, "I have sounded yours to its depths.

I know on what it has been based, I know how far it will go."

"I don't understand you," he said, with a bleak look. "But I am accustomed to your disfavor as a salamander to the flames. If you would but once take me seriously long enough to let me gain some assurance——"

"*More* assurance?" I asked him.

"I have been modest till now," he declared, unflinchingly, "but I'll be so no longer. Miss Dale, you must know my heart. Will you marry me?"

Though I knew his heart, I never before had realized the heights of his skill. He had but that morning been enlightened on the uselessness of wooing me; but he would fain withdraw in dignity and grace, let it appear that I myself had ended our relations. I was really grateful for this tact. He had chosen a moment for his offer when I was least graciously disposed, when my answer would be the most decisive. He had even refrained from lying words, making no declaration of love.

All this flashed through my mind as I chose the words for my answer. I respected his poor barricade of dignity—I made it as formally considerate as it was brief.

CHAPTER XVIII

SPRING MOODS

If Virgie missed me half as much as I missed her throughout that winter, she could not have been happy with all her gayeties. That she did miss me and repent of her share of our quarrel I had several proofs. Bud spoke of it once and delivered me a kind of oral message from her; I was so indignant at the means she had chosen to approach me that I would make no response. Another time Mr. Peyton-Call—who still came to the house, contending that his rejection as a suitor should not injure his standing as a friend—brought me a second overture of peace. It was a message to the effect that if Honey-Sweetness was to turn bitter and Pudd'n'-Pie was to disagree with her, there was no further balm in life. To this I responded with an affectionate note, telling her how deeply I missed her, how I longed to see her; how sure I felt that her warm heart and loyalty to me would let her promise now the one thing I wanted, the one thing on which our friendship could again be based.

After sending this note I looked hopefully

during several days for Virgie's coming. I was heavily disappointed. She was evidently in no mind to make me the required promise.

A little later I received a formal invitation to a dance at The Terraces, and enclosed therewith a scribbled card from Virgie, sweet and warm and naughty as herself. She was sick at heart for a sight of her lovely green-spangled dragon; wouldn't I come and dragon her and love her again? Nobody loved her now. Wouldn't I spend the night, and stay a week, and live always with my devoted friend, Virgie.

To this I responded in the same way as before, and this was her last effort at reconciliation.

One day Bud came home with a look on his face that fairly broke my heart to see. I thought that Virgie had brought her cruel play to the usual end. Alas, Bud's hopes were not crushed yet. He was white and still only because Virgie had left Rolfe for a time to visit in New Rome. Bud could not follow her; he looked with blank dismay on the long weeks of separation; but he told me, when I gently questioned him, that Virgie had most sweetly bidden him good-by and hoped he would not forget her till she came back. She had also sent her dear love and her good-byes to me, with the message that Rolfe was not endurable now that Cassy

hated her, and she must go away to try to forget about it.

We had bitter cold weather that February. Snows which in that section were considered deep enforced a vacation upon the school-children and myself. I was busy enough at home, for both Pearl and Lena were demoralized by the cold, and could scarcely be drawn from huddling over the fire all day long.

Bud was at home, restless and impatient; his heart was in New Rome. For all that he was more like himself toward me after the long days' contact when I had the opportunity of showing him how I longed for a sign of his goodwill and trust. As in the early summer, he now busied himself with carpentry work for me; and though he worked more and talked less than in those first happy days, I noted with deep content that he liked to see me near him. Our "good-nights" and "good-mornings" were once more pleasant. He was once more the real head of the house, reinforcing my authority with his own, in quiet league with me for the forming of Lena, confidential with me on the subject of Lilbud's shortcomings. He showed much sweetness and tact in regard to my relation with Peyton-Call, whom he soon understood I did not want to see alone.

"I reckon Don cusses me out right much," he said, regretfully. "I certainly do hate to

break him up like that, talking horse to him, when he comes to court you."

"He isn't courting me, as you call it, Bud," I explained. "He comes because he lacks other amusement. He hasn't the least idea of being serious."

And I tried to instil a judicious amount of poison in my good brother's mind on the general subject of flirtation. Bud was indignant, and rated me so soundly that I was almost tempted to read him those letters from New York which had so completely exposed his hero, Don of Caxton. In a more generous mood, however, I burned all that ugly proof of Peyton-Call's mercenary intentions, and forgave him wholly for the past.

Though Bud and I had such frank and intimate conversations, the one thing that lay nearest to our hearts we never mentioned to each other. With that shadow of Virgie between us, do what we could, we were never our old happy selves together. Bud smiled as lovingly as ever; but a quiet look of pain had settled between his eyes and never left him. He was rarely gay now; he was older, more determined, and, strangest of all, he had learned the use of scorn. Lena and Pearl were openly afraid of him; Lilbud had little or nothing to say at the family table and was rarely with us at the sitting-room fire at night.

We two would sit whole evenings out in silence, Bud staring into the flames, I scarcely able to sew, my eyes were so much upon his brooding face. It was then I came to realize how beautiful he was, even with the glow and sparkle of his former good-humor gone from him.

And yet as the ground froze deeper and the sleet made havoc in the forests without, we were growing happier again, warming each other's hearts with renewed kindnesses. Virgie's visit to New Rome bade fair to prolong itself for months. She was going out a great deal, so rumor told us; she was gay as never before, making many conquests, flirting many pretty dresses and fans, turning the heads and breaking the hearts of the whole town. I let Bud hear these things and he received them with a languid air; I began to believe his hopes were dying within him. I yearned to comfort him, I gave him every proof of my devotion; the short winter days and the lone winter evenings we spent in quiet and consoling companionship.

But the cold withdrew, the house was once more open, my school work recommenced, and spring was in the air. Bud was presently off and away. The house could not hold him in the revival of all his restlessness and longing. Our relations remained affectionate, but we

seemed to see less of each other than ever before. After the sweet promise of those winter days I was more desperately lonely than before.

The world was waking up around me, as spring advanced. The children in school were more affectionate, home was more cheerful. Pearl sang throughout the day, Lena had fallen into the habit of laughing and chatting much as she worked or idled, Lilbud went to field with great content, talked of his crops, talked of improvements, sat at the table with a brighter face; in him appeared some of the complacency and good-humor that had been Bud's. All seemed to be growing into their own ways joyfully without any reference to whether I myself was cheerful or sad. Since my moods did not count, I suppose I gave them play. Pearl, who daily walked with me to and from school, inquired of me one day:

"Miss Cassy, what makes you do like you *do* do?" in a tone that partook of reproach. Upon my questions she revealed to me that I had fallen into the way of walking with my eyes on the ground, that I talked only at table, and that I had the general air of a person who was "seekin'."

"I know white folks don't get 'ligion that a way," she apologized; "but it sho' do look like

yo' mind was gropplin' afteh de kingdom comin'."

I made efforts at a more spirited demeanor after that, and, conscious that it was an effort, grew inwardly more desolate. My school work was not hard enough and long enough to occupy my energy in full, now that the spring work in the fields withdrew a great number of my pupils. I spent the lengthening afternoons at home in doing Lena's neglected work, or in writing long, cheerful letters to Archer—which always made me feel particularly blue.

Sometimes Peyton-Call would stop at the school and ask to accompany me home. If I hesitated to accept his escort he would make half-humorous, half-pathetic protestations of his resolve not to annoy me in any way. When, then, I had dismissed Pearl he would propose a walk through the woods, a sight of the branch swollen by spring freshets, or a stroll up to Fair Hill. On the sunny piazza steps of that deserted house, whence we looked over forests and fields to The Terraces and to Caxton, I used to sit and dream away in retrospect over all I had learned since I had come to Rolfe. In the final conclusion it always came to this: what I had done had best been left undone; what I had learned was chiefly to subdue my love of power and action.

Or we would stand on the banks of the brawling, chafing stream, iron-red with the clay it had washed from the hills about its sources. There I would moralize quietly, even smilingly, on its course and on my own. I, like the mill-stream, had lost my head; like it I had swept away the barriers on which my usefulness depended, and had been since then inconstant, unreliable, unserviceable.

It seemed mockingly appropriate that my companion in these hours of contemplation should be the man who had added the most jarring note in all the discords of my life. His deceit, his hidden meanness had wounded me, not deeply perhaps, but lastingly. I had forgiven him: I even believed him capable of better feeling now. Certainly he acted consistently with the rôle he had assumed. Still it added a sombre tone to my thoughts to be reminded by his presence of one more evil incident to my coming home.

The spring woods, sunny, leafless, and sweet-scented, were my quiet consolation. I gathered none of the fragile flowers that had already begun to appear; I even passed them unnoticed until my companion pointed them out. What pleased me was the hushed rustling of the dead leaves underfoot, the tranquil stillness of all nature when we stood quiet.

And Peyton-Call left my moody silences un-

remarked, gave me the whole satisfaction of feeling myself alone. He himself fell easily into an hour's silence, serenely idle and content. Whether we sat or stood or walked there was never a hasty, graceless movement from him, or an irrelevant remark. He belonged to the open woods, harmonized in figure and bearing with every scene. The days when he had posed for my notice were happily over; he had grown impersonal, low-voiced, calm.

Slowly his personality grew restful to me. I needed him when he was absent.

My school closed at the end of March, and now we were in the very heyday of spring. None of the children breathed their relief more freely than I on the last day of dismissal. Now came a week of comparative idleness for me. Lena had taken to gardening, she and Lilbud were out-of-doors all day; Bud was horse-training in Lennox once more. I found nothing to do, nothing to interest me, and I grew amazingly restless and hungry for a change. If Virgie had been at home I should have gone to her without a scruple. My disapproval of her was worn threadbare. I was inclined to resent the trouble Bud had been to me in a sort of reaction against my long self-accusation. I was ready for some kind of excitement, some kind of play, after my long brooding; and

Peyton-Call took the occasion to reassume his old attitude toward me.

It was a mad April; gay, sunny days; clouds and storms; long, cold nights; and after them mornings fairly stolen from summer, so warm and idle and green they were; the season played on me for mischief. Though I believed Mr. Peyton-Call finally sincere as far as his light nature allowed, still I stifled conscience, and amused myself in a wholly reprehensible contest with him. Instead of dismissing him promptly as I had before, I undertook to tell him that he did not know his own mind; that sheer idleness and obstinacy had kept him at his game of devotion. Needless to say, he was entirely ready for this sort of a battle; with skill and cunning he both defended himself and attacked me; and having once for all denied myself the use of my one great weapon against him, I was not particularly successful in maintaining my charge. I began to scent danger, and tried to withdraw; and he threw aside his nonsense and for the second time asked for my hand.

"Our whole discussion has been beside the question, Mr. Peyton-Call," I finally declared. "Whether you are serious or not, you have my last answer. I don't want to be married——"

"But I do," he objected. "You ought not to decide for me in that radical way."

Then only I took the decisive step of banishing him from my presence altogether.

"You'll be sorry for this, if I die of it," he cried between resentment and sorrow as he departed. I laughed very easily; and as soon as he was out of sight I began to feel inexpressibly bored.

CHAPTER XIX

COLONEL FANTON IS CHECKED

It chanced that I had not been to visit the Baumanns for ten days or more, and I was unaware of the complication of their affairs till I was surprised one afternoon by a call from Mrs. Baumann. She drove up with Karl in the buggy, and alighted at my door in a very excited and unhappy frame of mind. She was on her way to the Court-house, where the case between her husband and Colonel Fanton in regard to the head-water purchase had been on trial that morning. Mr. Baumann had promised to come home himself at noon, or else to send a message as to how the case had gone; he had done neither. The wife's anxiety would not let her rest; she feared for her Wilhelm's safety among all those dreadful men.

In vain I tried to laugh away her absurd fears; she insisted that Rolfe County people were but half-civilized; that under the guise of justice the court helped scoundrels to fleece honest people; that furthermore there was much hard drinking on court days, as Wilhelm had often told her, and a great deal of fighting;

that Wilhelm would be furious if the case went against him and would talk out his mind, and that then these fire-eating Southerners would be more than likely to draw their pistols, which they carried always loaded, and shoot him down like a dog.

So now Mrs. Baumann was thither bound to know the worst. My offer to go with her was promptly accepted. Indeed, she had thrown herself upon my sympathy and aid in a manner that was very surprising in a person of her usual frigid independence. I reflected between amusement and pity on her child-like ignorance, and the mistrust she had of her surroundings. She was not even at home in the wagon, a timid driver herself, afraid to trust me with the reins.

Throughout the drive she kept up a flow of dismal speculation. If the case had gone against Wilhelm their capital was gone. Why would men insist upon speculations? Why had Dr. von Baerensprung ever started the unhappy reforestration scheme? If, on the other hand, Mr. Baumann had by any miracle received justice at the hands of the court, he must have been delayed or injured in a fight with that monster, Colonel Fanton.

"It is far more likely, Mrs. Baumann, that the case is not decided yet," I suggested. "If the hours announced were in the morning, it is probable that the court didn't saunter together

till some time after dinner. I think your going down there is all nonsense, and that Mr. Baumann won't be at all glad to see you."

"Papa will be mad," Karl joined in, shrewdly. "Everything makes him mad nowadays."

"Hush, Karl, we grown people are talking now," I said to my saucy pupil. Mrs. Baumann looked recklessly resolved to face her husband's wrath, rather than to endure any longer the torment of uncertainty.

To go to the Court-house on a week-day was a disagreeable experience for myself. I had been to the monthly services in the chapel there, but those were the only occasions when I had exposed myself to the curious gaze of the public. To-day there were scores of wagons, mules, and saddle-horses hitched along the fences of the several roads that led to the county-seat. There was a picturesque and rather tough-looking crowd of countrymen scattered in groups about the court-green and before the stores of the main street, a good many others were already riding and driving away. I looked with some interest on the scene in which I knew my brothers had so often taken part. This was the place of horse-trading, and of every sort of social intercourse among the men of Rolfe.

"I don't see any women. Do you think we can go up?" asked Mrs. Baumann, timidly.

"Of course we can go wherever we have any business," I answered, rather crossly. "Everyone here probably knows us, and knows we have a reason for being here."

I took the reins from her, and drove on to the court-house gate. As far as I could see, not a man in the whole vicinity but was perfectly well-behaved, sober, and indifferent to our movements. To Mrs. Baumann this driving up among them was a wild and almost wicked adventure. She was positively pale, and when an acquaintance of mine approached the buggy and raised his hat in cheerful greeting she gave a frightened little gasp.

He was a man I had met at the dance. I could not remember his name to introduce him to Mrs. Baumann; but I bowed to him and asked him whether the court had adjourned.

"About half an hour ago, Miss Dale; but I reckon no one has gone home yet. Do you want to see anybody? Shall I call anybody out to the buggy?"

"We want to speak to Mr. Baumann," I said, looking at his wife.

"Oh, I reckon he's in there yet," said my acquaintance, politely. "Let me go find him for you. Or won't you 'light and come into one of the offices? There's nobody much inside."

I thought that would be best, and we de-

scended from our carriage and left it to Karl's care.

"Do you know how the case has been decided?" I asked our guide as we went up the brick walk and up the dirty steps into the great white-columned portico.

"Well, I reckon it ain't been decided yet," he answered with some hesitation, and I inferred that things were going against Mr. Baumann.

"You-all wait in here," he said, courteously, flinging open a door to the right as we entered the hall. "I reckon Mr. Baumann is in Mr. Dickson's room. Mr. Dickson is his lawyer, ain't he?"

Mrs. Baumann nodded and our friend departed.

We were in a bare office with two or three closed desks and the general look of disuse. The chairs were too dusty to sit down, and I walked about idly looking at the State and county maps which decorated the bare plaster walls. Mrs. Baumann stood rigid and nervous in the centre of the room, listening for the coming of her lord and master.

I was anticipating a disagreeable scene between them and resented having to witness it. At the same time my heart ached in pity for my unfortunate friends. I very well knew that Mr. Baumann had meant to put his whole

capital into the enterprise his friend had pointed out to him.

But I was to be spared the scene after all; Mr. Baumann's voice was heard in the hall before he entered. His wife rushed forth to meet him. There was a short sharp interchange of words, strong feelings modified on both sides by the presence, presumably, of Mr. Dickson, who mingled soothing English explanations and encouragement with the German of the client and his wife. Then the three withdrew to a room across the hall and closed themselves in.

There was considerable movement in the room over my head. A good many men were coming down the stairway in the hall, and I judged the court's formal adjournment was only now followed by a general dispersing.

It provoked me that Mrs. Baumann should have left me alone, and I withdrew to the shelter of one of the window embrasures so as not to be noticed from the hall. Someone had seen me, nevertheless. I was suddenly startled to hear a man call out cheerfully on the stairs :

"Don, oh, Donald! Donald Peyton-Call! There's a lady in your office I reckon has been waitin' for you for some time."

"Where's my office?" came the voice I dreaded to hear. "Why the devil didn't someone send for me? Where's that no'-count

nigger that ought to be around here? Which is my office, anyhow?"

Someone must have directed him, there was a concert of short laughs from the men who overheard him, and thus ushered Peyton-Call hurried in upon me. When I turned to face him, he stopped short as if electrified and an unaffected radiance flashed over his face.

"Cassandra!" he exclaimed, in a voice vibrating with feeling. A wave of pity and self-reproach swept over me. I might have thought of this chance, might have considered him enough to have avoided this meeting. Now, by his looks, his hopes were flaming high and I must dash them.

"I didn't know this was your office, Mr. Peyton-Call," I said, as gently as I could. He came up to me and his face fell as he met my eyes.

"Won't you shake hands?" he asked, rather plaintively. "It's a weary lifetime since I have seen you."

I laughed and gave him my hand readily enough.

"How do you do?" I asked, cheerfully. He wanted to retain my hand; I shook my head and drew it away.

"I'm not at all well," he answered my question, dismally enough. "I don't expect to live my dog's life much longer. I've spent my time trying to drown my sorrow in hard drink."

He wanted to play on me to show some concern, and I prudently maintained an air of great indifference. As a matter of fact, my heart sank a little.

"I'm here with Mrs. Baumann," I explained, by way of changing the subject. "We are very anxious about the outcome of Mr. Baumann's case with Colonel Fanton."

"What's up between them?" inquired Peyton-Call.

"What, don't you know?" I asked, with surprise. "Haven't you been in court today?"

"No, indeed, I've been playing seven-up in Blair Lathrop's office ever since last night," he answered, moodily. "I don't know what time of the day it is, I haven't slept in so long. When I first saw you I thought it was about sunrise——"

I cut him short. "You surely know that your refusal to sell to Mr. Baumann the mill-site has drawn him into his present trouble, and——"

He looked so startled at my statement, and it seemed so out of character for him to be startled that the words died on my lips in my surprise.

"I wish you would tell me more about this, Miss Dale," he said in rather an unnatural voice, and he stepped nearer to me. "There's so

much litigation of every kind in Rolfe, you know, that no one can keep up with the cases which do not concern him."

It was obvious, however, that Mr. Peyton-Call felt himself concerned in this; and moreover, that he wished to conceal the extent of his interest.

"Dr. von Baerensprung when he was here worked out a scheme—" I began; he nodded. "Did you understand about it, Mr. Peyton-Call?" I asked, astonished.

"Perfectly," he answered, too intent for once to play his rôle of indolent indifference. "Fanton's land was to be reforested and thus my water-power restored. How is Baumann involved? He must have wanted to go into it; but didn't he give it up when he found I wouldn't sell?"

"He had been unwise enough to go to Colonel Fanton first," I explained, "who claims that he agreed to take the land and is suing him for payment. The truth is, Mr. Baumann had made his offer to Colonel Fanton conditional on your selling; but he is having difficulty in proving that. Colonel Fanton's practice in litigation——"

"I understand perfectly," said Peyton-Call, slowly, and my wonderment grew to see that the color was rising to his face and his eyes narrowing dangerously. "Colonel Fanton

thinks he can realize something on that land once more—after all."

"He will, unless someone comes to Mr. Baumann's aid."

"Since it was my refusal to sell which brought your German friend into his scrape," said Peyton-Call with a return of his usual careless air, "I suppose it is my place to drag him out of it again."

"That would be just," I observed.

"I don't care in the least about being just," he said, quickly. "If I serve him, it is only because you are interested in him."

"You must not do it on any such grounds," I protested. "I won't be in any way responsible for your selling the mill-site against your better judgment."

If he could thereby earn an approving smile, he stated, he would give the mill away and throw in Caxton; but I need not fear any responsibility in this case, the question of selling the mill need not enter at all.

"If I can stop Colonel Fanton's suit, and so let Baumann out without a loss, isn't that all that is wanted?" he asked, and I assented. "Colonel Fanton is probably still about the court-house," he continued; "I will see him at once and arrange the whole business in a very few minutes, I hope."

"Can you not tell me what you mean to do?"

I inquired, with a secret alarm I could not have explained. The set, hard curves about Peyton-Call's mouth recalled his mother's likeness vividly.

"I have a sort of claim on the land in question," he explained, politely. "It once belonged to my father, and he sold it to Colonel Fanton under a restriction. It isn't a matter of the least value or importance" (why, then, did Mr. Peyton-Call speak of it almost breathlessly), "but it will present exactly the right sort of obstacle, just at this point, to Colonel Fanton's getting rid of the land."

He took up his hat he had thrown upon a chair and paused a moment.

"It ought to be set down to my credit," he suggested, "that I am leaving you now to serve you."

"You aren't serving me, but a neighbor to whom, perhaps, you owe something by way of reparation."

"I am doing it solely for you," he returned, obstinately. "I don't love my neighbor. If you won't let me do it for you, I won't do it at all."

"Do it for me, then," I said, with an involuntary laugh, and then I added, gravely, "but I need not remind you of the first rule of chivalry—to serve without a thought of reward."

He bowed slightly and quickly left the room.

In the hall I heard him hail Blair Lathrop to inquire Colonel Fanton's whereabouts.

"He's up yonder in the court-room teaching Judge Casewell all about law," returned that light-hearted youth with a laugh; and I heard Mr. Peyton-Call run up the stairs. An impulse possessed me, and I stepped into the doorway of the room just as Blair Lathrop was passing. He stopped to greet me and shake hands with me.

"What's your business 'round these parts, Miss Cassandra?" he inquired. "I hope and trust that if you've come to consult a lawyer I'm to be the happy man. I haven't had a client, not in two years and seven months."

"I'm sorry I am not a client; I have come with Mrs. Baumann and I'm trying to admire your court-house while I wait for her," I explained; and then I remembered a passage in Mrs. Reman's diary, and added: "Aren't there some paintings here to be seen by visitors?"

"Certainly, up in the court-room—old portraits—hand-painted, done in oil, ante-bellum —only thing saved when the old court-house was burned," he returned, readily. "Come with me, Miss Cassandra. I'm proud to show you our treasures of art."

I followed my guide accordingly, and we went upstairs. When we entered the big bare

room, with its worn desks and bleak bare plank floor, my eye sought out the group of men near the window. Colonel Fanton was seated with an open law-book on his knees, of which he was turning the leaves, and behind his chair stood Peyton-Call and another man, apparently interested in the book also. There were several other people in the room, a colored man sweeping in the far end, the clerk of the court arranging some papers at his desk, and two countrymen squatting on the edge of the judge's platform engaged in loud and cheerful conversation on the profit and loss in raising mules.

"I'm a layman, gentlemen, but I've picked up right much law in the course of my life," I heard Colonel Fanton say pleasantly to the men behind his chair, and then the talk of the mule owners drowned the rest of his speech.

Blair Lathrop led me along the western wall of the room where the smoky old portraits hung and told me in turn who they were. We passed out of range of the mule-raisers' discussion, and I heard Peyton-Call's cool, low voice very distinctly.

"Someone told me downstairs, Colonel Fanton, that you're going to sell that big timber-tract south of you to Baumann."

"Well, I reckon I have sold it, Don," returned Colonel Fanton, easily. "I've had a little trouble——"

Here Blair Lathrop asked me what I thought of the beauty of one of his own ancestors who figured before me in a mighty wig. In responding I lost some more of the interesting talk in the window. The next words I caught were from Peyton-Call again.

" . . . the old agreement of purchase under which you bought that land of my father there was a restriction against the removal of the timber, wasn't there ? "

Blair Lathrop heard the words as plainly as I did, a remark he was about to make to me died on his lips, he uttered instead a faint whistle of amazement and turned to look at the group in the window. The two men on the steps likewise had heard, checked their own talk, and turned with curious interest to listen.

" Of course," continued Peyton-Call, in a pleasant and courteous tone, " there must have been a clause in that agreement providing for the perpetuation of that restriction in case of a sale."

Colonel Fanton had arisen and faced the other with rather a blank expression on his face. The third man had fallen back a few steps and leaned in the window, where he formed a motionless silhouette. Peyton-Call had placed his foot on the rung of the chair Colonel Fanton had left, and leaning on the back tipped it forward with a negligent air, while he con-

tinued to talk with a drawl a shade more lazy in his voice than was natural to him.

"If you were going to hold the land I shouldn't care about the contract, of course," he said, amiably. "My interests, I know, are always safest in your hands, Colonel Fanton. But if a stranger like Baumann is to own the tract I want my rights secured."

"Well, Don, I don't know anything about the contract," said Colonel Fanton in rather a raised voice.

Blair whistled softly once more; the two men sitting on the platform exchanged glances.

"As to that, neither do I," returned Mr. Peyton-Call. "I suppose it is lost. It seems to me I have heard it was lost. But can't you remember the terms? I think my uncle, who told me about it, said the terms were very simple. It was only a slight restriction on the cutting of the timber, wasn't it? I supposed, of course, you would have it all in your head. You're a lumberman, and I'm not, Colonel Fanton."

"No, Don, I don't remember a word about it, and that's a fact," said Colonel Fanton, in a cool tone of regret. "If I ever did sign such a paper at all——"

"Oh, I have proof that it once existed, quite sufficient for the court," returned Peyton-Call, quickly.

For a moment they eyed each other steadily. You could have heard a pin drop in the court-room. The negro janitor had become affected by the nervously charged atmosphere and stood with open mouth looking at the motionless group of men.

"Well, what are you going to do?" inquired Colonel Fanton, with a menacing growl in his voice.

"What do you think ought to be done?" asked the other, with the air of cordially deferring to the older man. "Don't you advise me to try to recover the terms of the old agreement or restriction, so that it can be re-established before the land changes hands? You have so much better a business-head than I, Colonel Fanton, that I feel in this case the practical suggestion should come from you."

"My suggestion is very practical, Don," returned Colonel Fanton, with a rather saturnine manner of benevolence. "I advise you to leave this business alone from the start. You'll gain nothing, and you may make yourself as well as me a great deal of trouble. Your interest won't suffer when Baumann gets the land, because his only idea is reforestration."

"Reforestration!" echoed Mr. Peyton-Call, with exquisitely feigned surprise. "I am not aware that the land needs reforestration. It's well timbered, isn't it?"

There was a suppressed explosion of laughter on the part of Blair Lathrop. The silhouette in the window moved uneasily. The mule-owners rose to their feet in their excitement to hear the battle wage so hot; and around the firmly closed lips of Peyton-Call there hovered a mocking smile.

At the same time a dangerous flush had spread over the face of the older man. He stood there before a heartless tribunal, confronted without warning with the startling intelligence that what he believed he had done in secret was known and talked about in all his little world. More than that, the man he had wronged from childhood, and to whom he had since desired to make reparation, was conscious and coolly scornful of it all.

I reflected that this was Virgie's father and my heart sank in pain and shame at this scene, so unmistakably an exposure. And I had willed it! I still willed it; the German and his family must be spared, justice must be done toward him who was so insatiably greedy of his neighbor's goods. Yet tears filled my eyes as I witnessed the older man's confusion.

"I think the best way for us to establish the terms of the old agreement, Colonel Fanton," said his antagonist, steadily, "would be for me to bring a friendly suit against you. What do you say? If we can prove the paper is

lost, there may be found witnesses to the terms."

"Take care, Don, take care," cried the other, and anger rumbled in his voice like advancing thunder. "You might know me well enough —you-all know me well enough" (he addressed his witnesses here with the air of defying all the world), "to know I won't stand any fooling. If anything you do, Don, interferes with or delays my suit against Baumann, I—shall—not—regard it—in—a friendly light."

He spoke with a real menace. Peyton-Call returned his look with a stony stare of contempt, but still maintained his farcical courtesy.

"Of course, I could never feel anything but friendly toward you, Colonel Fanton," he said, with a slight inclination of the head. "I see no reason why my slight claim, coming in at this point, should interfere with your deal. At worst, it can only delay your suit a few days."

"So you persist in getting into my way, do you?" thundered the other.

"Colonel Fanton, I would not be in *your* way —not for anything in this world," returned Peyton-Call, with a mocking bow. He stepped aside with an air of deference, and drew his chair from before the other as if to leave him a free passage to the door.

Before the group could disperse I slipped out and away, very unwilling to be caught eavesdropping by Peyton-Call. My escort was so transfixed with interest at what had occurred that he had forgotten all about me. I paused in the shadow of the stairs, uncertain where to go. Now Colonel Fanton stamped down past me, and I noted an ugly look of decision on his face; then followed the three nearer witnesses to the scene by the window. They talked eagerly in low voices as they went down the stairs together.

"Don's awake at last, and that old curmudgeon is caught in his own tracks," said one, with a chuckle.

"This will let Baumann out fast enough," observed another.

"What you reckon struck Don to show so much spunk? Didn't think he had it in him!"

"Oh, he won't fight it through, he's too damn lax and lazy. He just took a notion, that's all. I wonder if somebody has been talking to him and opening his eyes."

And they passed on down and out of my hearing. I heard Peyton-Call's laugh, and feared to be seen on the stairs after all; the Baumanns stepped out of Mr. Dickson's office just in time for me to join them. Blair Lathrop came hurrying after me, full of apologies for not following me from the court-room.

"Now, I want to show you the old iron safe that has a dent in it made by a Yankee shell," he said, still under the impression that I was sightseeing. "It's a great dent! You must see it. It's in Judge Casewell's room."

But I thanked him, bade him good-evening, and followed my silent friends, the Baumanns, out to the court-house gate.

CHAPTER XX

A STORMY EVENING

SOMEWHAT to my surprise I found that Mr. Baumann expected to drive home with us in the buggy. I was to perch on Mrs. Baumann's knee, Karl was to crouch down in front. The absurd sight of the four of us preparing to enter a one-seated vehicle naturally attracted attention. Mr. Peyton-Call promptly appeared to beg for the privilege of taking me home.

"Ei, das kommt ja sehr gelegen," said the astonishing German woman, the same who had not so long ago warned me against this very company. Now that her husband's comfort in getting home was involved, she deliberately turned me over to this escort, quite regardless of the fact that I was still an "alone-standing young girl."

"Will you drive or walk, Miss Dale?" asked Peyton-Call. "I have no rig here, but I can send over to Caxton instantly." And his voice pleaded. "Be gracious! Don't refuse!"

"If you don't mind walking over with me, Mr. Peyton-Call," I responded, a little uncertainly—telling myself that there really was no room in the Baumanns' carriage.

And so we were alone again and I was glad of the touch of belated cold in the air of the falling night, for it made it appropriate to walk fast. We crossed the fields in front of Caxton. The house looked greater and statelier as the shadows in its porches deepened; once or twice my companion looked toward it and turned to me as if about to speak, changed his mind, apparently, and walked beside me with eyes on the ground and silent. We entered the dim spring woods, warmer than the wind-swept field and full of evening fragrances; we passed on down toward our glen to take the shortest way home.

For once it was not my own mood that imposed silence between us; I would rather have talked on indifferently, but something of deep dejection, almost of perplexity, in Peyton-Call's manner bound my tongue.

In the middle of the glen he almost startled me by stopping and saying, abruptly:

"Here is the spot where you first—frightened me."

I remembered the tree, the moss where Dr. von Baerensprung and I had played at making parks. I remembered how Caxton had come down toward us through the sunlit glen, with his russet hunting-coat and red hair, a picture done in flaming colors. How indifferently I had admired his appearance then! Nowa-

days, as I realized with a light shock, I made a point of not looking at him.

"Why don't you ask me how you frightened me?" he demanded, complainingly, like a child when you blunder at his game.

"How did I?"

"I see, Miss Dale, that you want me to tell you the story of my life," he said, cheering up.

"Dear me, no, Mr. Peyton-Call!"

"But I can't explain how you frightened me except by telling you the story of my life."

I made some cold-hearted remark about there being so little time in life for adequate explanations; and in spite of his protest I hurried our pace a little. Between the spring and the house we met Bud.

"Lil' Cassy, I was gettin' uneasy about you," he said in a warmer tone than usual, and I think he was glad to find me with Peyton-Call. "Lena told me you went with the Baumanns, and I had met them on the road. They might have stopped by and told us you were all right. How are you, Don; I'm mighty glad to see you. Ain't it turned cold? Do you reckon the boys will want to go fishing in the morning? Come up, Don, and have supper with us."

"Pray do, Mr. Peyton-Call," I added, when he waited for my consent; and I was sadly amused to realize how soon was broken my resolve to see no more of him.

In the house his silent mood had vanished; he was gay and cynical as I had never seen him. Bud was stimulated; the two kept up at table a flow of mocking stories, taking off the absurd scenes about the court-house, yarning of jovial times on hunts and fishing excursions, exposing every tricky horse-dealer in the county, and finally, when material for making fun of their neighbors failed them, baiting each other with extraordinary malice. I had never realized before on what good terms they were, how many experiences they had in common. It was a pleasure to see Bud strung up to his highest social pitch once more; to see Lilbud beam with enjoyment of all he understood, and Lena convulsed with laughter over things she did not; but our visitor's gayety was forced and reckless, and pained me more and more.

When supper was over we were supposed to retire all together to the sitting-room; but my family mysteriously and completely disappeared, and my guest and I found ourselves alone in the fire-lit room. I was not minded, however, to undergo any further strain.

"I should ask you to sit down; but why should we make each other gloomy this evening?" I said, gently and frankly.

"Cassandra, let me stay," he begged.

"I must ask you to give me my title, Mr. Peyton-Call."

"Which one? Lil' Cassy? Honey-Sweetness?" he asked, tentatively. "Neither of them suit you. You're not little and you aren't in the least sweet."

"You are ungrateful. I try to be kind," I returned, as usual succumbing to his impudence with a laugh.

"Then you'll let me stay, Miss Dale," he pleaded. "Just one hour! Think how big and dark and lonely my house is to-night!"

"Why can't you be sensible!" I said, with a suppressed sigh. I knew something myself of the boredom of being alone. "Be seated, Mr. Peyton-Call;" and I took the shade from the lamp on the table.

"Don't light that," he protested. "What an extravagance, with this blaze on the hearth! Will you never get over your multi-millionnaire habits? I don't wonder you shrink from becoming a poor man's wife."

I explained that I wanted to sew.

"You shall not sew," he declared, firmly. "This hour is mine. I intend to tell you the story of my life. I was born in Rolfe——"

"One minute, pray," I interrupted. "I can sew and listen, can't I?"

"I know what sort of listening you would do," he said, disdainfully. "Words won't describe your unconcern for me when you have your work in hand; I am ten times outweighed

by the dish-towel you are hemming. No, Miss Dale, if you insist on sewing I shall withhold my really thrilling autobiography and read you"—he made a pass at his pocket with a wicked laugh—"some verses of my own composing."

"What a threat?" I ejaculated, and took the seat he placed for me in the firelight. He stood against the mantel with his arm upon it, as Bud had stood that first morning and looked at Virgie. A flood of recollections, of sad anxieties assailed me. Poor Bud with his vain hopes! Poor feather-brained Virgie, who could not see what a treasure of devotion she flung to the winds! And alas! for us two, subtly, inextricably bound to torment each other.

The pause grew long. "Begin," I said lightly. "You were born in Rolfe? Your father and mother were poor but honest——?"

Crash! went a vase from the mantel to the floor, knocked off by a sudden twitch of Mr. Peyton-Call's arm.

"I am desolate!" he exclaimed, kneeling to pick up the pieces. "How could I be so awkward? And this, I take it, is one of Mrs. Lena's wedding presents. Will she ever forgive me?"

"It's my vase; and don't be troubled about it, Mr. Peyton-Call," I said; and then because of his evident surprise as he held the pink and

green fragment in the firelight, I added: "Bud gave it to me, but he will get me another like it."

"How you do love Bud!" he exclaimed, as he placed the broken pieces on the shelf.

"Shouldn't I love him! My gentle, big-hearted brother!"

"That has nothing to do with it!" he declared, throwing himself into a chair. "Bud worships *you;* and you are harsh and have no heart at all. It's just a mutual admiration society between all you Dales; and the rest of us, who so sensibly and so keenly see each other's faults, how we pity and despise you in your fond blindness!"

"Upon my word, Mr. Peyton-Call, I would almost rather hear your verses," I said, reaching for the match-box.

"Ah, I wish I had prepared some!" he exclaimed, with venom. "Wouldn't I punish you!"

"What is the use," I asked in a reasonable tone, "of our sitting here and cavilling? You had much better go home and play cards with someone."

"I was born in Rolfe—" he said, hurriedly, in narrative tone. I laughed and leaned back in my chair again.

"I was born in Rolfe," he repeated, more slowly; "but my mother was born in New England."

A peculiarly sombre shadow seemed to fall upon us with this mention of his mother; was it a ring of pain in his voice? I turned my face toward him, startled into attention now; his own was in shadow. He continued, quietly.

"Her family are curious people. I shall never understand them, I suppose. Rich for generations, but frugal, almost mean; cold in intercourse, long-winded and tiresome of speech, or else taciturn beyond belief; common-sense is their religion; I veritably believe they have no better; and one after another as the boys of the tribe mature they become keen, bold, silent business men, and one after another they get rich on their own account; it being family policy for the parents to give nothing to their children except shrewd advice. The women of the family, one and all, have Work which they spell with a capital W. They rise early and take trains. Besides this reprehensible worthiness, the Powltons are distinguished by a contempt for their fellow-beings, a snobbishness which passes understanding. Have I made the impression, Miss Dale, that I descend, on my mother's side, from the most disagreeable tribe that a community ever allowed to wax strong in its midst?"

I was not deceived by his attempt at a light tone—he was mocking and bitter; and now a

sort of heat slowly grew on him as he continued.

"Every family has a changeling in the course of its generations, I suppose; my mother was a horror and surprise to her kinspeople, as she developed without the characteristic Powlton traits. She wasn't cold, she wasn't correct, she wasn't industrious, she wasn't frugal; she was a high-spirited, hot-tempered, generous child; and they gave her a harsh rearing, thwarted her, corrected her, denied her, shamed her; and she grew more unmanageable and more daring and more beautiful to spite them. Out of such a home as that she escaped into marriage with my father; and as he was a slaveholder, my grandfather—that pious and thrifty abolitionist—made haste to disinherit her; which, as it gave him much satisfaction and my parents no pain whatever, was a very fortunate occurrence."

He turned a little, and the firelight fell on his face. His brow was contracted, his lips set. It was almost as though in talking of them the traits of his mother's people were written in his face—the energy, the gloom, the contempt of life's sweetness.

"You can see that my mother would naturally enter Rolfe sunshine like a butterfly broken out of its cocoon. Here she found everything she had been starved of—admiration, freedom,

money to throw away, slaves with which to play at tyranny, and my father, the most devoted of husbands. She found herself more beautiful and better educated than the women she came among, and she had the childish delight of making them jealous; everything tempted her to fling herself, heart and soul, into a life of pleasure."

He paused and I still watched his face, almost breathless in my attention. And now a change came over it—it softened in expression. For a flashing moment he looked like Virgie.

"If you, Miss Dale," he said, in a low voice, "should hear of my mother from outsiders that she was vain and extravagant and too eager for pleasure, would you not understand?"

"Everyone would understand," I said, gently. "You should not speak so—pain yourself so needlessly. You ought not to let a morbid thought grow on you."

He looked up with a curious smile.

"No, I won't let it grow," he said; "and forgive me if I make too great a claim on your sympathy. I undertook to tell you about myself; and in true modern style I must explain my fate by the character of my parent, and lay that again at the door of fate. But I was an orphan at the age of five," he continued, in a lighter tone, "and transplanted for the greater part of the year from my native Rolfe; so there

comes in the corrective influence of environment. I now skip about twenty-five years——"

"But why do you skip so much?" I asked.

"Because nothing very interesting happened to me," he explained, "until I met you."

"You needn't finish then," I said, hurriedly. "I know all the rest."

"Pardon me, you really don't," he said, with a mirthless laugh. "I have kept a part of it secret. It relates to my own faults."

And now I comprehended what he was about. He was approaching the issue between us; he meant to confess or explain or excuse his interest in my fortune.

"I don't mean I've kept my faults a secret," he continued, "though, of course, I have tried very hard. But there is something behind my general worthlessness which throws the real shadow." And then, suddenly, he rose to his feet and stood before me. "I could have won you, Cassandra," he exclaimed, "except for this shadow which you have seen and not understood. I must tell you now, even if it revolts you the more from the idea of ever bearing my name. I can't carry the burden any longer."

"Tell me, then," I said, almost voicelessly. My heart was failing me. I thought I could scarcely endure him to confess that he had been the mercenary schemer, the cold-blooded fortune-hunter.

"My mother, as I told you," he began slowly, "passionately loved the life that only money could give her——"

Indignation and amazement forced an exclamation from me. Did he mean to show me that he had inherited his vice of avarice, and in this poor-spirited fashion evade some of the blame?

"What do you suspect?" he demanded, quickly, sharply.

"I can't listen," I gasped.

"And I find I can't tell you," he said, with a sad laugh. "I thought I should have the courage;—but human nature has its limitations. And why should I waste my golden opportunity. I should use every minute of this hour to tell you how I have loved you since the first minute that I saw you."

"I won't hear that," I cried, with an access of anger, and instinctively I rose to my feet and stepped back from him. For him to dare, almost in the same moment with his first purpose of confession, to try to blind me now, to lead my suspicions away from the truth—it was more than I could calmly suffer.

"You shall hear the truth," he declared. "I loved you then; neither was it a sin beyond pardon, as your horror implies. I had known for a long time that Virgie didn't care for me, that our betrothal was a game she meant to

end; and I tried, in spite of that, to believe myself faithful to the sweetheart of my boyhood. But after I saw you—I couldn't."

"I will believe that you care for me now in a way that honors me," I answered him steadily and sternly, "if you will take back this last unmeaning piece of flattery. You did not care for me from the first. Do you suppose I was unsensitive and dull enough to be deceived by your behavior last fall and last winter? Do you think I could take seriously your perfectly hollow courtesies——"

"Ah, I know what you mean," he said, with a sigh. "You have always felt I was not sincere; there is the shadow again! And I can't find courage to explain."

"Good-night, Mr. Peyton-Call," I said, coldly. "This discussion is a great mistake; our meeting at all is a mistake. We shall both be too sensible to let it occur again."

"I'm not so sensible," he cried; and then, with a touch of his native boldness, "and I don't believe you are!" I felt the angry blood mount to my cheeks. "Pity alone should move you," he pleaded, humble again in time to save himself from the descent of my wrath.

"I do pity you," I said, scornfully. "You want to be true and your inveterate habit of pretence makes you unable to speak the truth."

"What do you mean?" he cried, flaring up angrily in his turn.

"You think to impress me with all this futile nonsense about loving me at first sight!"

He stepped nearer.

"If a man told me I lied, I could knock him down or shoot him," he said, in a grave and gentle tone of remonstrance. "With you, I suppose, I shall only be permitted to 'sass back'; and I would say, Cassandra, that if *you* want to impress *me* that you are stonily indifferent to me"—here his mischief broke through and he laughed—"you shouldn't show jealousy!" and he swiftly laid his hand on my hair and bent back my head to kiss me. I cried out and we fell apart; to do him justice, he was white as a sheet.

"On my soul," he protested, faintly "I thought you had relented."

My rage died down at seeing him so stricken.

"I will forgive that, if you will go now, and never come again," I said, mastering myself; "and if you will confess before you go, that I did not accuse you unjustly. Confess that in your heat to persuade me you have let yourself say things here that were not true."

"What wasn't true?" he demanded, hotly, his color all restored.

"Confess that your first interest in me was the farthest removed from love."

"It was plain, old-fashioned love-at-first-sight, like my father's before me," he cried, resentfully. "Plague take your Yankee raising, if you can't understand that! I didn't care what you were or who you were. If you had ever taken the trouble to think of me a moment, you would know without my telling you that I never was a snob. From the day that Virgie set me free I have hoped to win you."

Bold and splendid lying that! And how cleverly he dodged the point about my fortune to assure me of what I knew, that he disregarded my lowly origin. My temper in all my life never left me so completely as now, and I dismissed Peyton-Call with one wordless gesture.

And he, cold and white now, assured me steadily he would not annoy me again.

So he was gone for the second time; and I tried to learn in the next few days how to carry anguish and mask it under serenity.

CHAPTER XXI

BROCADE AND SACKCLOTH

It surely is set down to Lilbud and Lena's credit against the Day of Reckoning the patience with which they endured Bud and me that following week. My elder brother and I were both plunged in different phases of the self-same woe. He was in a fever because it was rumored that Virgie had betrothed herself in New Rome; I was tormented with vain regrets; and though we both kept quiet, our tragic airs must have been insufferable. Certainly, I had no patience with Bud's forlorn mien, and he told me, with brotherly frankness, how unbecoming it was to me to look "peaked."

"I reckon you've been and snubbed Don again, and this time you're sorry," he added, with cruel insight. "You'll do that once too often, Sister; he's mighty devoted, but he's proud as Lucifer."

I wished desperately that nature had made me, also, a little proud. I seemed for the first few days in which Peyton-Call kept his promise of leaving me alone, to lack all spirit. Then I rallied a little, and when we chanced to pass

each other on the road, I was able to bow formally and meet the cold look with which he accompanied his salute with perfect composure. We met again in the chapel after Sunday service and repeated our correct little scene. I began to think I was coming out of the matter as easily as he could be, with all his pride.

Meanwhile I heard the news that there was a hitch in Colonel Fanton's suit against Baumann, and there had been a delay; that it was even likely that the whole matter would be quietly dropped, and my German friend be released from his embarrassment. Lilbud could tell me little more than I already knew. There was something to do about "an old claim of Mr. Don's," and Lilbud said evasively that it "wa'n't easy to explain." Very obviously it was a disagreeable subject.

Two days before Virgie's return was announced Bud rode out of Rolfe. He told no one where he was going; he bade us a short good-by and took the Lennox road. I could explain it in only one way. Bud's eyes had been opened; he was riding directly away from his temptation. His pluck and decision enspirited me. I was resolved to take life on a high plane once more, to have done with all foolishness.

And I would be reconciled to Virgie. Not for Bud, not for anyone would I longer miss

her friendship if she was willing, as I was, to renew it. I wrote her a note of welcome and sent it to The Terraces the eve of her arrival. With eagerness, but with scarcely a misgiving, I awaited her response.

I had not long to wait. Earlier in the day than I had thought she would be home a mounted colored boy brought me Virgie's reply.

"Dearest," it read: "You make me so happy with your first kind words in so long. I would fly to you to thank you and kiss you, Honey-Sweetness, but I have the house full of company, and as they are only down for one night I must give them a jolly time. I have fixed for a surprise for them and for you, my Cassy. We are all going to dress up and have a big ball just among the house party and Blair and the Dyers. I'll send the carriage for you at seven, I want you to come early and help me dress. I must see you alone" (the last words underscored). "I don't want you to have an escort, because Don can't come. I have lots of extra men up here, one *very* nice one I hope you'll like, so mind you come alone. Lovingly, faithfully, Virgie."

I pondered over this note; it evidently was meant to exclude Bud. Virgie did not know he was out of the county or she would not have taken this trouble; moreover, I knew that such an exclusion would go against the grain with

her, whatever her sensible resolve of dropping my poor brother.

And I was furthermore displeased at her strong hint that I would naturally come with Peyton-Call. Altogether the note was like Virgie herself, puzzling, reassuring, warm, cold-hearted, all the contradictions at once.

But to see her alone was what I myself most urgently desired. I accordingly put off Blair Lathrop, who called in the afternoon to ask to escort me to The Terraces. I promised him any number of dances, however, and that he should see me home.

"I suppose you and Miss Virgie will need about three hours before the dance begins to tell each other your secrets," he asked, sarcastically.

"About so much time," I assented.

"You find out, will you, whether it's true what everyone says, that she's engaged to that ridiculous fellow Harris, and then tell me?"

"Of course, I'll tell you everything," I assured him, sarcastic in my turn.

"You'd better not tell *her* everything," he suggested. "She left the men of Rolfe to your tender mercies when she went away, and if you confess how you treated them she'll be righteously wrathful."

"My conscience is fairly clear," I began.

"Clear, is it?" he interrupted. "How about

Don? He does nothing nowadays but attend to business. It's a sign that he's going insane."

"Your own sanity is perfect, I know, Mr. Lathrop," I suggested. "Does it mean you never attend to business?"

"Never mind!" he returned, vaguely. "You can sass me, but wait till Miss Virgie gets hold of you. Since the day she jilted Don he's become a special favorite of hers."

I felt vaguely that there was a sort of parallelism here; it was only since the day I had finally dismissed him that I myself had thought favorably of Donald Peyton-Call.

"Uncle Price," the Fantons' old coachman, called for me early in the evening; and dressed in the gown Virgie liked best, prepared to meet her with love and humility, I drove in state to The Terraces.

The lamps were yet unlit when I arrived; the dying sunset was in the great rooms. In honor of Virgie's return the house had been decked with green and with the early flowering branches of the spring woods. White dogwood spread its star-like splendor in the hall; and from the parlor, which had been so close and carpety all winter, now streamed the bewildering scent and rosy light of the swamp azalea.

I had scarcely set foot in the hall where Miss

Lucy Call received me, when Virgie's voice called from upstairs: "Is it Cassy? Oh, make haste, Sweetest, make haste! I can't wait."

We met with tears and kisses after our four months' estrangement. The separation seemed a bitter mistake. Each asked and each granted forgiveness; neither had, perhaps, a very clear recollection of the principles for which we had contended.

Finally Virgie drew me from the dark hall, where we had embraced and whispered awhile, into her candle-lit chamber. There was Miss Page Whittacre, dressing before the mirror.

"You-all know each other," said Virgie, and our greeting was very cordial. "I won't introduce Cassy to those other girls till they are dressed, for fear if they see this lovely gown of hers they won't be satisfied with what I have loaned them."

"As usual, Miss Dale, Virgie is lending all her pretty clothes to her company," Miss Whittacre explained to me. "I don't know what in the world she is going to wear herself; she makes out like she has a whole trousseau stored away somewhere."

"Nobody knows my resources," said Virgie, lightly, and she knelt down before her great dark wardrobe.

"These girls, Julia and Anna Moore, came unexpectedly to visit me yesterday, when I

was getting ready to come over here with Virgie," Miss Whittacre continued to me; "and, of course, Virgie insisted on bringing us all along together, and promised them all ball-dresses and slippers and fans and everything they lacked."

"I bribed them with promises or I should have lost Page," put in Virgie, carelessly, "and that is the reason I must give them my best things and wear some old thing myself—some very old thing."

She was drawing forth a large pasteboard box, and I realized what she was about.

"Virgie, let me go home and get you something of mine," I said, hastily. "There's plenty of time."

She looked up at me, and her eyes were dancing.

"Oh, no, there wouldn't be time," she said, very decidedly; "besides, I have just what I want right here."

She lifted the lid of the box, and disclosed the gown of Donald Peyton-Call's mother—the gown in which she had last danced, and in which she had died.

"You won't wear that!" I cried, appealingly.

"Indeed, I shall. I am perfectly delighted to have an excuse to wear it," she returned, obstinately. "Look, Page! Isn't it lovely?"

She lifted it, and shook out the heavy rose-colored brocade. Page clasped her hands rapturously, and demanded to know all about it.

"Can't tell you now," returned Virgie, with a short laugh. "It gives Cassy a chill. She is so superstitious."

"Virgie, don't wear it," I urged.

"Why not? Don isn't coming. It's the only chance of my life to wear it," she returned lightly, as she spread out the several pieces of the garment upon her bed.

"Oh, did it belong to your Cousin Lucia? I wouldn't wear it, Virgie!" protested Page.

"How do you know that Mr. Peyton-Call won't come?" I asked her.

"Because I didn't ask him," she answered, flashing a smile at me; then, passing close beside me she murmured, wickedly: "Did I get you here on false pretences, Honey?"

"Why didn't you ask Donald?" exclaimed Page, with astonishment. "I thought you and he were perfectly good friends again."

"Indeed we are—almost brother and sister," returned Virgie, flinging her head about before the glass as she arranged her soft hair. "'Tis papa and Don who are out, for a wonder. I don't understand it. Papa has always been perfectly devoted to him. I certainly was surprised when he told me not to invite Don to the house. Of course, that won't last long; I

couldn't stand it. Don is my dear, sweet cousin, I must see him around, and besides——"

She broke off artfully, and flashed another laughing look at me.

"I expect you to live at The Terraces this summer, Cassy," she said, with a little gush of warmth. "We must make up for this long separation now."

"I shall probably not come again at all," I said, with temper.

"Then I shall be obliged to come and live with you," she returned, in tranquil singing tone. "How would Lena and Bud and Lilbud like that?"

How artfully she flung the significant name between the two indifferent ones!—and without giving me a chance to reply she ran from the room, saying she must look after her guests across the hall.

"Virgie really should not wear this," said Page Whittacre, who was still admiring the gown. "Old things ought to be respected." She was turning it over with little sighs of pleasure. "And how heavy to dance in! I wonder at Virgie. I'm sure, among all her clothes she has something more suitable."

For my part, the thing touched me so painfully I could not speak of it. I felt I should not show Miss Whittacre the whole strength of my objection. Perhaps the occasion had

really uncovered the superstition in my nature. The shining folds on the bed menaced evil to my eyes.

I turned the subject, offered to tie Miss Whittacre's ribbons, and we chatted casually before the glass until Virgie returned.

"Now you-all must make haste and help me to get into this," she cried, and hurried to her dressing as if afraid of a renewal of our protests. "I have to be pinned into this thing, it most doubles on me. But when I'm all fixed it will be lovely. I've tried it on before."

Page Whittacre good-humoredly lent her aid. I would not touch the dress, but looked on in disapproval.

"Fix it so I can get out of it alone," commanded Virgie.

"I can't do that," said Page, who was working at the waist-band. "The skirt's so heavy I'm bound to put in these big pins. I'll help you get out of it to-night."

"No," cried Virgie, pulling away with unwonted petulance. "I want to be able to get out of it all alone, and at a moment's notice. I may not be in the mood to wear it the whole evening," she added, more sweetly. "You-all don't know. Perhaps I'll dance a part of myself out of existence to-night. The dress is a kind of haunt."

"Well, I'll try," said Page, looking grave at the allusion to the gown's history. "But if it slips and you find yourself dancing in your petticoats, remember I warned you."

"How it swishes around me like water, as if I were the queen of the sea," cried Virgie, in a little gush of ecstasy. When I saw how real was her delight in the beautiful garment, I somewhat relented in my displeasure. After all, it was but to destroy the old, unhallowed association with that gown for Virgie to dance happily in it till she was tired of her whim.

"I'll drown the sound of the river when I dance, and the river will be jealous," cried Virgie, rustling her train. "Never mind, old Tannegee, this is the end of it all. I'll never taunt you with brocades again."

I went to the window, and raised the sash. The noise of the rushing waters came up through the garden trees.

"You won't drown that wild noise with any swish of silk, Virgie," said I. "How loud and full it is!"

"The river is very high, it is still singing its spring song," said Virgie. "Every year it does the same, and I look forward to these exciting days all winter long. The river and I are related, we always get high together, and I can't bear to be away from The Terraces when that day-and-night music is playing. That is the

reason I wouldn't stay any longer in New Rome. 'I must get back to my Tannegee,' I said to myself;—and I pretended to the Harrises that I had a sweetheart in Rolfe, and was pining to see him again."

She seemed to me to be talking out of her natural strain. In truth, if her own image in the glass affected her, she could be forgiven some excitement. The rose-colored silk was marvellously becoming to the fragile girl, and the very richness and antiquated elegance of the dress made her look peculiarly fresh and child-like.

"Virgie, you are lovely!" cried Page, with unwilling enthusiasm, standing off to view the result of her deft pinning and folding. "It is a good thing that you didn't have this with you in New Rome."

"Please don't hint to Cassy what I have told you about my doings in New Rome," said Virgie, in mock alarm. "I don't tell her the kind of things I tell you, my gentle Page."

"I am sure you wish you were in my place, Miss Whittacre, to be spared the recitals," I suggested.

"I do indeed," she responded, with a proper tone of severity; "I am tired to death of Virgie's flirtations."

"Page, you evermore put on airs, you humbug!" said Virgie, carelessly. "You laughed

till you liked to have cried when I told you about Mr. Harris."

Page admitted reluctantly that this particular account of Virgie's had been very amusing.

"I made it amusing," cried Virgie, with a sudden note of weariness in her voice. "I am that witty I can make the most dismal thing amusing—even my last few weeks in New Rome. Think of it, Cassy, I had three proposals in four weeks."

"I wish you could have found it in your heart to accept one of them," I ejaculated.

"One of them?" echoed Virgie, with a return of all her flippancy. "I accepted them all —provisionally—is that the word?"

"I declare, Virgie, you are 'most too bad," exclaimed Page Whittacre, indignantly, throwing down her paper of pins and taking up her fan. "I am going over to the other girls."

She left the room while her hostess laughed gayly; but she had no sooner closed the door behind her than Virgie turned to me with drooping lips.

"Cassy, talk to me, let me feel ground under my feet once more," she said with soft appeal, coming to my side. We leaned arm in arm out of the window sill, looking out into the fresh spring night and she went on, murmuring: "Isn't it curious how intensely disagreeable a

proposal of marriage is, when it comes? You expect it to be a delightful excitement. I felt so faint and tired and disgusted with those men, one after another. What business had they to fall in love with me? Nothing in the world but impertinence. Besides, I have my opinion of men who care for me when they have only seen me at dances and on evening calls. I'm not myself then, am I Cassy? The real Virgie is a much nicer girl, isn't she? Now the right man will love me by daylight, in my own home, when I am busy and sensible and look after the servants and the horses and the visitors. The right man will think me most beautiful in my old riding-habit all splashed with mud when I come in from the run——"

The honeysuckle in the garden below us flung up its perfume with the fresh breeze from the roaring river waters. Far away over hazy lines of forest was gathered the light of the coming moon.

Virgie bent farther out of the window, her eyes searched in the blackness of the terraced garden. I bent too, and thought I descried the figure of a man under the yew-trees. It was very indistinct. Virgie raised a white arm in the light from the window, almost as if to make a signal.

"Do you see anyone?" I demanded of her.

She laughed softly.

"No, indeed! Do you reckon Don is out there, Cassy?"

"Why should he be?" I asked, crossly enough.

"Why should anybody be out there?" she inquired in a tone of having triumphed over me. "And then again, why *shouldn't* anybody be there? 'Tis a beautiful garden! I'm going out there myself to walk in the moonlight when everyone is dancing happily. Don't follow me, Cassy, I shall want to be alone. If you come after me I shall throw you over the terrace into the river." Her voice grew sweeter, she laid her head caressingly against mine. "And if you are drowned, poor Donald will die," she continued, playfully. "I will be kind to my cousin, I won't drown his lady-love——"

"Virgie, you are strange to-night," I said, with an attempt at coldness.

"Cassy, you make me a stranger," she returned, with sudden feeling. "Why do you refuse to tell me about Donald?"

"There is nothing to tell."

"Honey, you may not be lying, but as Mammy Juliet would say, you certainly are telling *what ain't*. I know all about Don's courting you. I've had—news."

"If you know so much, why do you ask?" I said, wearily. "Don't tease me, Virgie!"

"No, I won't," she said, with a burst of tenderness. "But tell me one, just one thing, Cassy; hasn't Don *any* chance?"

"He doesn't want it, fortunately," I returned. Alas, my tone was too indifferent by all odds. So much for play-acting! Virgie instantly read my secret pain.

"So you've quarrelled!" she exclaimed. "Well, I reckon I know what that means; both of you turned to ice for a time! 'Taint worth while for you to deny it, Cassy. I know your mean tempers."

I was silent, ashamed, and miserable. Suddenly Virgie flung her arms around my neck.

"Sister! I'm so happy to-night!" she whispered. "I want you to be happy, too, Lil' Cassy!"

Her lips were pressed against mine, her tears were on my face.

"Virgie, what makes you happy?" I demanded, frightened to the depths of my soul.

"Haven't they told you; hasn't it been talked about?" she demanded, whisperingly. "I'm engaged."

"Then it's true?"

"Yes, it's true."

Alas! Poor Bud!

"Virgie, who is it?" I asked, trying to speak joyfully.

"He's downstairs," she returned, her voice

full of mischief. "He's come all the way from New Rome after me. You look around, when you go down, and pick out the happiest-looking man, and that'll be he. And don't you tell anybody, Cassy; I want to announce it myself, in my own way!"

She kissed me again and again, and then ran out of the room.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PARLEY

WHEN I went downstairs the members of Virgie's house-party were assembled, ready to go in to supper. I met no less than three men who had followed Virgie from New Rome, and among them I looked in vain for the signs of her certain preference. Mr. Harris was decidedly handsome, and Mr. Larouche was amusing, and Mr. Tarwell had a distinguished bearing; but Harris I thought very slow, and Larouche had the air of being somewhat fast, and as for Mr. Tarwell, he was nearer Colonel Fanton's age than Virgie's, and in feature he was rather more than plain. Moreover, none of the three looked beatific, as Virgie had prophesied. I was greatly puzzled and not in the least pleased.

"Which one do you like best?" Virgie whispered to me, as the men and girls followed Miss Lucy Call's lead to the dining-room.

"Mr. Harris," I said at a venture, thinking it must be he.

"Mercy me! What taste!" returned Virgie;

yet she laughed delightedly as she whirled away from me.

Colonel Fanton was not himself that evening; he sat at the head of the table and attempted to make pleasant remarks to the young people nearest him; but I noticed he made the same pleasant remarks again and again; and there was a deepening of the furrow between his eyes. All the attention I could spare from observing Virgie's three lovers, I bestowed upon her father. His evident uneasiness affected me. I cast about for every sort of cause. Was he unhappy over Virgie's betrothal? Certainly he was not very responsive to Mr. Tarwell, who tried amiably to draw his host into conversation; nor to Mr. Larouche, whose funny stories he did not in the least understand.

Perhaps, like Miss Lucy Call, whom I had heard roundly scolding Virgie about it, he was displeased his daughter should be wearing that gown. Perhaps he had his own associations with that rose-colored brocade. Did he know that pinned in the bodice was a paper which by rights belonged to him?

Virgie's dress occupied all her guests in turn. It was the topic of the supper-table. The men declared she had stepped out of an old portrait; the girls thought it "too sweet and pretty for anything in this world!" And after supper, when the Blaylocks, and Dyers, and Blair La-

throp arrived, the exclamations and questions began again.

"Yes, it's old! Yes, it has a story," Virgie told them. "I'm not going to tell you-all about it, 'taint worth while to ask me questions. Now, are you-all ready to begin the ball?"

But though "Uncle Lindon" was there to play with his fellow-musicians, and though the house was alight and the floors cleared, the dancing did not proceed with any great spirit. It was a balmy, moonlit night and the guests, for that great house, were few. They scattered in the piazzas and the terraced garden for the most part. Only here and there a couple circled through the empty rooms. The talk and laughter, scattered as it was, scarcely disturbed the quiet of the house.

Our gray-haired leader of the orchestra was discouraged.

"'Pears like you-all ain't feelin' very spry," he called to Virgie as she came sweeping down the hall alone, her train rustling magnificently. "I reckon you'se fixed up too fine to dance, Miss Virgie."

"We're all enjoying ourselves in our own way, Uncle Lindon," returned Virgie, cheerily. It was obvious what was the entertainment of the evening to her; she had her eyes on her own sweet image in the long mirror of the hall. "You just keep right on playing. They're

listening to you through the piazza windows. That's just the way I want them to do to-night."

"I never saw such a slow crowd in all my days," Blair Lathrop confided to me. "I'd never know I was in Rolfe. Let's you and me show them a little waltzing, Miss Cassy. Let's start on the front piazza, south end, and waltz through every room and wind up at the north end at the back piazza."

I was listlessly complacent and we entered upon the exploit; the piazzas were long, the rooms were many, and Blair conscientiously did every corner of every room. By the time we reached our goal, the extreme end of the piazza that led along the east wing of the house, I was out of breath.

"That was a good, thorough job of dancing," declared Blair with pride as we sat down in the moonlight on the steps to rest. "And it was done by Rolfers, that's the main point, as I mean to make plain to the New Rome delegation."

Page Whittacre and Mr. Tarwell now approached us from the garden.

"What? Is that forlorn music still going on in there?" inquired Page.

"We really should go in and dance," said Mr. Tarwell. "Miss Fanton will surely be hurt if we ignore the ball!"

"Better try to emulate us," Blair proposed, and then he bragged of our feat accomplished. They were attracted by the idea and waltzed away to see whether they could equal us.

"That man's ugly enough to stop a clock," said Blair, looking after Mr. Tarwell. "Tell me, Miss Cassy, *is he the one?*"

"I don't know," I said with distress.

"Great day in the mornin'! A sweet, pretty girl like Miss Virgie!" exclaimed Blair in disapproval. "Before I'd let her take an old charred stump like Tarwell, I'd marry her myself."

"Perhaps it's Mr. Harris," I suggested.

"That bank of moss? Never with my consent," said Blair, firmly. "I reckon Miss Virgie'll be obliged to go up to New Rome and bring down another lot for us to select from. Certainly we can't admit that young horse-jockey Larouche into the genteel and exclusive society of Rolfe, can we?"

"I never found Rolfe very exclusive," I observed, with a suppressed sigh.

"Go away from here, Miss Cassy! You're putting on airs. What's troubling you tonight, anyway? Never saw you so forlorn! Is it because you don't like the way Miss Virgie is switching around in your dress?"

"My dress? It isn't mine," I gasped.

"Don't tell me, I know better," he returned,

shrewdly. "You-all are mighty apt to think a man has no observation; but I can see plain as anything that dress was built for a taller woman than Miss Virgie. Besides, I remember your wearing it at Caxton."

"So much for your observation. I wore a blue gown."

"A sort of pinky blue, wasn't it?" he coaxed, a little put out.

"Plain, everyday, light blue."

"Well, your scarf was pink," he declared, "the one you lent Don."

"Mr. Lathrop——!"

"It's been on his desk ever since Christmas until just this last week; so I thought he'd given it back," explained Blair, with the relish of the practised mischief-maker. "You're right curious about lending your things, Miss Cassy; after you've let people have them you don't seem to like for them to enjoy them. Now Miss Virgie looks mighty sweet in your dress, and your scarf seemed to suit Don exactly. I walked in on him one night when he had his head down on the desk, sitting there all alone, and your scarf——"

"I'm going in now," I cut him short and rose.

"Miss Cassy, I declare I'll behave myself," he promised humbly, rising also. "And if you want your scarf back, I'll get it for you. Don is coming up here to-night."

"Surely not," I exclaimed. "Virgie says he is not asked."

"Not to the dance; but he has a special invitation from Colonel Fanton to come up here and allow himself to be chewed up."

"What do you mean?" I asked, uneasily.

"What an interest you are taking!" observed the malicious Blair.

"You know I heard the beginning of their quarrel in the Court-house," I returned, "and it concerned my friends, the Baumanns."

"Well, the row is reaching its climax to-night in a private interview. Colonel Fanton leads us to believe he is going to finish Don up—" Blair laughed easily—"grind him to fine powder and scatter him under the rose-bushes in the garden yonder."

I sat down on the steps again, thus giving my lively companion all the invitation he needed to talk on.

"You remember, Miss Cassy, it's all about a lost paper, an old agreement?" he asked. "Don insists that the terms must be re-established before that land changes hands. You saw enough, I reckon, to realize that any investigation of that business would be mighty disagreeable to Colonel Fanton. Now he's told Don that he has the means of checking this investigation."

"Do you suppose he really has?" I asked.

"Oh, he has something up his sleeve—no doubt of that," returned Blair, easily. "But the joke of the thing is that Don can't be hurt. He's mighty nigh invulnerable."

"Invulnerable!"

"Of course *you* haven't found him so. I meant about business matters. You see how Colonel Fanton can be made to squirm when you touch his property interests; but Don's that poor you can't take anything away from him."

"He loves his house."

"Well, now, he told me once he hated it," said Blair, in a lower voice. "He said he keeps it open merely for the convenience of the family ghosts. You know, Miss Cassy, the darkies say his mother dances there on moonlight nights. Do you know the story about her; how she died——"

"Yes, yes. I can't bear to hear it," I exclaimed.

"You're right! It's a mighty ugly way people have got into, talking about Mrs. Peyton-Call," said Blair, regretfully. "I wouldn't have Don know it for anything in this world. But as for Colonel Fanton—" Blair laughed again—"he can prove, if he likes, that he can smash Don up and sell him out. It won't move Don. He's got that idea of helping Baumann stuck crossways in his head—I never saw him

so 'sot.' Of course, he's just as sweet and cool as gourd-water about it. You ought to have heard him tell Colonel Fanton this morning that if he doesn't withdraw from his suit the investigation begins to-morrow, you'd have thought, by his manner, he was inviting the Colonel to waltz."

"And then Colonel Fanton threatened?"

"Yes, he was furious," returned Blair, with enjoyment. "'I'd like,'" says he, "'to present *one last consideration* to you, sir.' Don was most happy to consider anything. 'Not here,' says Colonel Fanton, with you know what kind of a wave of his hand. 'Come to my office, sir, to-night, sir, at nine o'clock, sir, and I hope to convince you, sir, that you'd better keep out of my way, sir."

Blair was waving his hand about in monkey imitation of the older man and I checked him. It was just in time, for Colonel Fanton at the very moment came down the piazza toward us.

He asked us with perfunctory cordiality whether we were enjoying the moonlight, and when we had responded politely he entered his office, the end room of the wing by the piazza door before which we were standing. He lit his lamp in there behind us, then came and closed the door, and drew the window-shade.

"All the preparations for a pitched bat-

tle," murmured Blair. "But don't go, Miss Cassy," as I rose and moved away. "We aren't in danger of eavesdropping for an hour yet. Don's appointment is at nine o'clock; and I will say for him, he is never too early anywhere."

I paused then, and tried to collect myself. For the first moment I had been too much startled at the thought of meeting Peyton-Call by accident to realize the full weight of all I had heard. Now I rapidly reviewed it and drew my conclusions.

There was to be a "pitched battle"; Colonel Fanton had "something up his sleeve"; he hoped to convince Donald Peyton-Call that it would be to his own disadvantage to investigate the question of the lost agreement.

And there was one and only one vulnerable point in Peyton-Call's armor of indifference; he cared nothing for his lands, nothing for the praise of his fellows—but he adored his dead mother.

And I had seen a paper which proved this mother had had business relations with the tricky Colonel Fanton. The receipt for a large sum of money from Colonel Fanton was hidden in the bodice Virgie was wearing to-night.

Mrs. Peyton-Call had needed money for her gayeties; there was little she had to sell. Colonel Fanton had wanted a certain paper

destroyed—and though it was her son's whole inheritance—— !

Blair's easy joking was suddenly become unendurable to me. I excused myself and went upstairs, meaning to take refuge with my puzzled and dismal thoughts in Virgie's room. I found her door locked; some of the girls, I suppose, had retired to "talk secrets" together.

A sense of loneliness, absolute helplessness, oppressed me as I lingered in the dim-lit upper hall of The Terraces that evening. Here I was in a house full of strangers; Virgie the strangest of all in her new happiness remote from me and mine; and poor Peyton-Call was coming into this house alone, as into a hostile camp, to receive a blow that must nearly destroy him; and I who knew what threatened him should be unable to warn him, to shield him, to lift one finger in his behalf. Here I must fret away the hour in the bare upper hall, and hear the mocking dance-music from below.

All Colonel Fanton wanted was money. The poison he had for his young neighbor was merely in self-defence. Peyton-Call was in the way of Colonel Fanton's making a deal, therefore he must be crushed. Anyone with money could have stepped between——"

But why had I not money? I had given it away, to be sure; but my friends, the Henry Remans, would they not be generous with me?

Even as I formulated my new idea I hurried downstairs to seek out Colonel Fanton in his office; not by the big central staircase, but into the wing and down by a way that let me into the back piazza, once more at the office-door. There I knocked and was bidden enter.

Colonel Fanton was amazed to see me, and not particularly glad, for the moment. He looked at the clock and so did I. It was a quarter of the hour.

"I know you have an appointment, Colonel Fanton, and my business is about just that," said I. "I shall take only a few minutes of your time."

He placed a chair for me with great politeness, made some remarks intended to be flattering about a lovely girl's forsaking the dance and the companions of her own age to delight him with her presence, etc. I remained grave and waited till he had finished.

"I have a proposition to make to you, but before I begin I must ask you, Colonel Fanton, to regard it as a secret," I said. "If anyone in the world besides yourself were to learn that I have interested myself in the matter, it might be highly disagreeable for me. You will presently see the reason for that."

He protested that his discretion was absolutely perfect; and I was gratified to note that I had already his whole attention. I liked

Colonel Fanton less at this moment than ever before. At his own desk, in the shabby office room, with a lowering expression on the face he turned to me, he looked altogether hard.

"I am wondering, Colonel Fanton, whether you would be open to a business proposition concerning that land about which you are suing Mr. Baumann," I began. "I think I could engage to find you a purchaser if you will let Mr. Baumann go for the present."

Colonel Fanton pursed his lips and eyed me doubtfully.

"The Baumanns are very good friends of mine," I said, by way of explanation.

"Then why don't you arrange with Baumann? He doesn't really want the land," said Colonel Fanton, astutely.

"Of course no one wants the land," I returned, getting a little confused on my line of attack. "The point now is not so much to help Baumann as to get you to withdraw from this suit."

"Everyone seems to want me to withdraw from this suit," he observed, with an air of being very shrewd.

"Precisely; you must withdraw. You will be forced to withdraw," I said quickly. "Why not do it in time, Colonel Fanton, while you can do so with profit to yourself?"

"My dear young lady, profit is a thing one

likes to see beforehand. What is your proposition?"

"I should state that I have no money of my own, Colonel Fanton; but I have friends who feel themselves greatly in my debt. If you will keep the land till I can represent it to them as the good investment that it really is—" Colonel Fanton here began to shake his head with a slow business-like smile which so put me out that I could scarcely continue; "I don't mean that you shall believe me without proof of this. I have plenty of letters at home which will show you exactly how I stand with my friends. Again and again, they have offered to do something for me, for my brothers, or for the community where I have chosen my home; as for their wealth and credit, it is easy for you to investigate that for yourself. I only ask you to take the time to do it before you—take any further steps."

"I am in no hurry myself," Colonel Fanton assured me, blandly. "Another party is pushing the matter to an issue. He is attempting to interfere with my suit against Baumann, and I am reluctantly forced to proceed, in a manner, against him also. For this reason only am I anxious to get the whole matter settled as soon as possible."

"I ask you, then, to concede to the demands of this other party and let your case against Bau-

mann drop," said I. "Upon my word, Colonel Fanton, you shall not be at any monetary loss. I will positively find you another buyer for your land." (He smiled incredulously.) "I know all about Dr. von Baerensprung's reforestration scheme, and can present it to my friends as a safe investment; or he will do so for me, he is still in New York."

"You feel that this representation will be sufficient to them?" asked Colonel Fanton. "You feel sure they will consider it a safe investment?"

"I am sure; but they'll even take a large risk to oblige me. Our relations in that respect are—peculiar."

"Very," he returned, sceptically. "But even if you have these peculiarly obliging friends, Miss Cassandra, it's a little hard to believe they would go into this. Where is the certainty of returns? This idea of that German professor always seemed to me *pret-ty* visionary." (Here came the waving hand.) "But even if they'll believe in that, as you do, there's the mill-site can't be bought. If Baumann couldn't buy it, nobody can. We have a saying in the county, the Calls are mighty 'sot.' That you are aware, ma'am, is the darky word for determined. Don Peyton-Call, I am pained to say, is 'sot.'" Colonel Fanton nodded with a smile half-indulgent, half-disapproving, and repeated

softly, as if testing the word to himself, "sot!"

"Then," I said firmly, "he will be immovable in his resolve to prevent your foisting this land on Baumann."

"Not immovable in this particular case, I think," said Colonel Fanton, with a note of danger in his tone. It roused my wrath.

"You mean you can move him? You mean you are armed against him?" I demanded, in a lowered voice.

Colonel Fanton looked considerably startled. Instinctively we both arose from our chairs and faced each other.

"What do you know?" he demanded almost breathlessly. The question involuntarily slipped from him.

"I know the whole story. I know your connection, Colonel Fanton, with the disappearance of that old agreement with the elder Peyton-Call," I said, and now my voice trembled with terror at what I found myself doing. It had not been my remote intention to bait Colonel Fanton. I had been carried away by excitement and temper.

And he? He was perhaps a shade paler, but he faced me with a brazen dignity, and pompously poured forth nonsense.

"You say, ma'am, you know my so-called connection, ma'am, with the supposed disap-

pearance of a paper which never existed, ma'am? Then I assume you are also aware *who* was really accountable for the disappearance of said paper; and you'll be moreover aware, ma'am, that I am quite capable of taking care of myself with my knowledge of the actual facts, ma'am; *my knowledge of the actual facts!*"

"Yes," I returned, hotly. "I know that Mrs. Peyton-Call succumbed to the temptation of your bribe, that she secretly sold the paper to you; that you destroyed it and straightway violated the terms, making a large fortune by cutting bare the headwater tract of the Peyton branch."

"Very well, ma'am," he cried, with a boldness that surprised me. "You may know this story, in which there isn't one word of truth, and others may know it; but there is one who doesn't know it yet; and you may be sure that when he learns it, it will spoil his pleasure in having his old claim on that timber tract publicly investigated."

"So this old secret about his mother is your whole weapon against him to-night?" I asked, wrathfully.

"It is, ma'am, since you put it that way!" he returned, with a snarl much like an irate dog on a chain.

"What will you take to lay down this

weapon?" I asked. "I can raise any sum of money—if you will give me time."

He stood still a moment; I thought he was considering the matter. Then he shook his head and remarked, in a more amiable tone than he had been using, that a bird in hand was worth two in the bush.

And so I, who could have bought this man ten times over in days gone by, who could still command his price with a stroke of my pen, I was entirely helpless. In New York my rejection of a great fortune was but yesterday legally complete; here in Rolfe I was the poor sister of the Dales, with no credit; and my word was wind to the business man.

"Colonel Fanton, you have always appeared to feel particularly kindly toward your neighbor, your wife's young cousin," I said, changing my tone to one more gentle. "Through all these years you have been atoning for the wrong you did him as a child by—speaking well of him upon every occasion."

"I certainly have been good to Don," he admitted stupidly, and I thought he seemed softened. I continued without scruple to flatter him, sure of the principle that a man feels himself most firmly bound by his own past kindnesses.

"You have stood by him and defended him when everyone else was hostile in criticism,"

I continued. "You were always his business adviser. You meant to be his father——"

"Yes, and I'm willing yet," he assented, thoughtfully. "I'm hoping Virgie will change her mind again and marry Don. Her mother changed her mind six times about me."

"And in that case," I added, keeping under my own dismay at the suggestion, "in case he ever becomes a member of your family, how you would regret having hurt him as you have planned to hurt him to-night! And what is it for? A miserable sum of money, wrung from a poor foreigner; a profit made on land from which you have once already made enormous profit——!"

Alas! I had struck the wrong note. Colonel Fanton's face lit up with pleasure at the thought of fleecing his foreign neighbor; at the thought of making a double profit on his land.

"All most true, most true, Miss Cassandra!" he said, rocking his head regretfully. "But I never let sentiment interfere with business, ma'am."

Meanwhile I had forgotten all about narrowly watching the clock, as had been my intention. We were interrupted by a light rap on the door; it was immediately opened, and Peyton-Call appeared on the threshold. He started slightly at seeing me, then coldly bowed,

and was about to withdraw with an apology for disturbing us.

"Come in, come in," called Colonel Fanton, hastily. "Miss Cassandra and I are through."

The other may have seen by my face how little satisfied I was with the result of my interview. He begged to be excused for half an hour, he would go out into the garden to smoke and rest; he had been riding fast.

"Business first, smoking afterward, Don," said the older man, sharply. "Come in."

So I was actually dismissed. I murmured good-night and moved to the door; the master of Caxton held it open for me with his own courtly inclination. I dared not glance a second time at his impassive face.

CHAPTER XXIII

A GAUGE OF HAPPINESS

BUT as I was passing out I came abruptly upon Virgie, and she was in such a startling guise and company that I involuntarily stepped back as though I had seen a ghost.

She was in her dark riding-habit who had been so lately flaunting her rose brocade; and the ball-gown she had taken off trailed over her arm. Behind her stood Bud—Bud, who was supposed to be twenty miles away in Lennox. His face was set and white with excitement, his eyes brilliant as I had never seen them.

"Don't go, Cassy, we want to see you," commanded Virgie, "and hasn't Don just gone in there, and where's papa? We want to see you all three. Come in, Bud, and close the door."

Her notes were high and clear and trembling; when she entered into the lighted room I saw her face set in new lines of resolution. With a certain hasty care she spread the shining gown upon the table over books and papers while we stood in expectant wonder. Then she faced her father with bravely lifted head.

"Papa, I've come to confess; I aimed to

elope with Bud to-night—" and not heeding her father's exclamation of wrathful surprise she continued—"but while I was dressing I thought about how outdone you-all would be, and how it would hurt your feelings, papa, and I changed my mind; so I made Bud come in here to confess everything."

With slow turnings of the head and looks of wonder we all consulted each other's eyes; but Virgie had no air of being demented, she continued, in a calmer tone:

"Besides, I want to give back his mother's dress to Don and ask him to forgive my wearing it this once. It's the end of my being frivolous and selfish now." She laid her nervous little hands on the gown and folded it as she talked. "I'm ashamed, Don; Cassy made me ashamed, of trailing it around like this. It was in my mother's keeping and in mine, but now I give it back to you. You care for old things, I know."

Her cousin stepped up and half mechanically helped her to fold the silk. He seemed dazed, as indeed we all were. To see the two so strangely engaged was like a scene in a dream.

"But this is really papa's," said Virgie, suddenly, "I'll take it out."

I almost cried aloud when I saw her unpinning the bit of paper from among the laces of the bodice.

"There's no use keeping things from people they belong to," she said, as she turned with the paper to her father. "Now this dress—I've always wanted it for my own, to wear when I pleased, but now I see it wasn't meant for me. It would be a ridiculous gown for Bud's wife."

Now I really cried out, and Colonel Fanton thundered "What?" Bud stepped forward and took his stand by Virgie's side.

"This is yours, papa," said Virgie, maintaining her calm, and she laid the bit of paper on the top of her father's desk. "And you needn't look so surprised because I say I'm going to marry Bud. I promised him in New Rome when he came after me, and I have told all these men who are here in the house I was engaged to somebody else, so it's perfectly fair. I aim to be a good girl after this, because Bud is perfectly good and never lies. And that's the reason I wouldn't go off to-night without telling you and Cassy. So now—good-by, papa!"

Her tone dropped to a winning and childlike appeal.

"My daughter—I forbid it—that's all," gasped poor Colonel Fanton, waving his hand to sweep Bud off the face of the earth.

"Don't you know it's not worth while to forbid it?" said Virgie, in a sweet tone of argument, and she put both her arms around her be-

wildered father's neck and kissed him on the cheek. Then she came to me.

"Cassy, sister!" she cried, with a little sob and a laugh, "good-night! And excuse us for not inviting you to the wedding. 'Tisn't the way of the Dales, you know, to have any great doings. Mr. Wykof's going to marry us at his own house, and his wife's our witness and we really don't want the family."

"Miss Cassandra," cried the father, appealing to me in his desperation.

"Virgie! Bud! Think a little! Take a little time! Give us a little time!" I urged, not very conscious of what I was saying.

"All foolishness to think!" declared Virgie. "What was it you said of me once? My heart's bound in triple brass. I jump without thinking."

"You're right, Virgie, don't think," said her cousin in a low voice as she turned to him, and he took her hand. "Go along and marry your sweetheart; and Bud, old man, bring your bride to Caxton and stay with me."

"Don, I knew you'd stand by us," cried Virgie, with a little gush of tears. He swept her up and kissed her. Colonel Fanton groaned at the sight and pointed at them and nodded dismally as if to say—"this is what *I* had planned." Bud, too, was disturbed in view of the caress and involuntarily stepped forward.

"Oh, go away from here, you silly," scolded Virgie, when she turned and noted her lover's jealousy. "Isn't Don going to be our brother?"

"Looks like I can't stand it, though," said poor Bud, helplessly.

Donald Peyton-Call laughed and put Bud's and Virgie's hands together and pushed them gently to the door.

"No more talk now, we're busy," he told them; "go and get married first, and come and tell us about it afterward."

"Don, I forbid you, sir," thundered Colonel Fanton, only fairly coming to his wits, now that Virgie was out of the room. "I forbid your sustaining my daughter in her disobedience and folly."

"'Tain't worth while, papa!" came Virgie's singing call from without. "Good-night, you-all, good-night!"

And Bud's mellow voice echoed hers, "Good-night, Li'l Cassy and Don. Good-night!"

Colonel Fanton made for the door. Peyton-Call laid a light restraining hand on his arm.

"You know your daughter, sir," he suggested.

The father groaned again and turned. Then his eye fell on me where I stood still, transfixed. His face lit up at finding someone he could blame.

"Well, ma'am, are you satisfied with what

you have done, ma'am?" he demanded wrathfully. "Before you came to this here county of Rolfe, ma'am, we had standards, we had traditions of what was becoming to a lady, ma'am, and my daughter, she was conscious of her place, ma'am. She observed the customs of the society to which she was raised——"

"Till, like her mother before her," cut in Peyton-Call, "she fell in love with a promising young fellow of a less exalted social position, and married him in the face of a great deal of foolish opposition on the part of her family. I am not mistaken, am I, Colonel Fanton? Wasn't it in this way that my cousin, Virgie's mother, married you?"

Colonel Fanton looked at him with mute rage.

"Will you please apologize to Miss Dale for the tone of your address?" continued Peyton-Call, stonily, "and take back your statement that she is to blame, even in the remotest manner, for what has occurred?"

"I *don't* blame Miss Cassandra," said Colonel Fanton, rather hurriedly. It was very obvious he read a threat in the other man's face. "I beg Miss Cassandra's pardon. I was hasty, I was distracted in my natural melancholy over the departure of my only child. I'll say more, Miss Cassandra; if my daughter must go her headlong way, I am at least thankful she has

for a friend and sister a person of your elegant education."

I bowed in acknowledgment of this extraordinary compliment, and turned to the door, still open. Then I remembered with a pang the business that had first brought me here and that had been so startlingly interrupted.

"Colonel Fanton," I said, by way of a last effort. "Doesn't your daughter's marriage to my brother give my wishes a little more weight with you? I beg you will hear me further on the subject we have been discussing."

"Miss Cassandra, as I have already told you, I can't let sentiment interfere with business," returned Colonel Fanton, firmly. It was astonishing how quickly the natural melancholy of the distracted father was merged in the hardness of the man of affairs. "But here's Peyton-Call right at hand. Why don't you try to move *him?* If you can persuade him to get out of my way in regard to this suit, I'll gladly agree not to trouble him."

I was aghast. So much for trusting to the discretion of a man like Fanton! This was the way he kept his promise of absolute secrecy. There I stood, burning with anger and confusion, and Peyton-Call's eyes searching my face. A slight color had mounted into his own.

"Miss Dale would not be so inconsistent, I

think," he said, coldly; "after interesting me in Baumann's case herself, she would hardly interfere again, just at the moment when I am gaining a point for her *protégé*."

"She has found out things since which have made her change her mind. You're her *protégé* now, Don," said this dreadful Colonel Fanton, with a short, stupid laugh. Between dread and wrath I could not utter a word. I was a helpless prey to Peyton-Call's gaze.

"Do I understand that Miss Dale has learned that Colonel Fanton is mysteriously threatening me," he asked, slowly, "and, in her kindness, has attempted to ward off the blow?"

"That's exactly it, Don," said Colonel Fanton. "She's been here asking me to let you off; and I want to do it, damn it all! I don't want to bother you, Don! I can remember old times" (his voice wavered) "when I had hopes you would become my son. But not for you nor anybody—" (he was his harsh, stubborn self again and ended snarlingly) "will I let go of Baumann. You drop this business of investigating that old agreement—or I'll finish you up!"

"I join my appeal to Colonel Fanton's, Mr. Peyton-Call," I said, faintly. "I wish you would withdraw from the business you entered upon, as I understood, only to do me a favor. It will no longer be a favor. I see my way

clear to helping Baumann myself, if he has to take the land. And I'm not willing you should be troubled any further. I should feel responsible."

"Ah, that's it, is it?" he said softly, and defiance blazed in his eyes; he was in the frame of mind to take everything wrong. "I understand your motive, Miss Dale, in withdrawing your request that I shall help your friends; but I am not in the habit of reconsidering matters of this kind. The matter has become wholly impersonal; I am interested in it for its own sake, and you are absolutely free from the least obligation to me. Moreover, I will say to quiet your scruples, that I am not in the least afraid of Colonel Fanton's hidden trump. He thinks he has a secret of which the revelation will crush me, but—" he turned toward the other with an access of mingled wrath and disdain, "— I have known it for years!"

Colonel Fanton dropped heavily into his office-chair and stared witlessly at the younger man, who now walked slowly up to him.

"Where is Virgie's paper?" inquired Peyton-Call, in a low voice; and he saw it on the desk and snatched it up and looked at it. Then he tossed it down to Colonel Fanton with contempt.

"Saves you a verbal confession, doesn't it?" he muttered. "Our business for to-night is

over, Colonel Fanton, if this is all you had to tell me."

He turned again toward me. My face must have been white; at any rate, he read my horror and paled himself.

"Do you know it—too?" he asked, falteringly.

I covered my face with my hands; but when he strode toward me, pity steadied my nerve, and I looked up to answer him.

"Virgie once showed me that bit of paper—" I began.

"And Virgie, too?" he cried, with an unspeakably bitter laugh.

"No, not Virgie; only I understood," I answered, sorrowfully.

"Ah, how easy it was for anyone to understand!" he exclaimed. "And wasn't it interesting, Miss Dale, to make a study of me, to understand me and my pitiful life of lies?"

I shook my head, struggling with tears.

"So that's the reason you've been tolerant—and scornful," he continued, in a voice to exclude Colonel Fanton at the other side of the room. "You knew the miserable secret over which I was standing guard. You knew why I was conservative to stupidity; you knew why I posed as a swaggering loafer!" He flung out the words with the force of long pent-up disgust.

"No, no!" I protested, faintly.

"I say yes!" he returned, hotly. "It's simple enough, isn't it? I knew that the first step of progress in my native county would raise a clamor about that mill, that water-power. Men are living who knew all about my father's hopes for that property; all about his contract with Colonel Fanton. People have gossipped in private for all these years over Colonel Fanton's timber speculations. How easy for those gossips to go a step farther and inquire how Colonel Fanton came to dare it! But my absolute worthlessness and laziness was a sort of explanation, and I was doing my best to supply it in full. Now you understand, I suppose, my horror when I saw in you the capitalist and in Baerensprung the keen promoter——"

I seemed to grow suddenly a little giddy and reached for the back of a chair. There I leaned and looked at the floor, and tried to collect my scattered wits. Had I understood it fully? Had I now the whole explanation of why Peyton-Call had investigated my claims on the rejected fortune?

He addressed himself to Colonel Fanton once more, speaking quietly again.

"But I am through with it all, I mean to let the law take its course," he said. "You can't keep a secret from people who have a right to know it. I've been shielding your outrage,

Colonel Fanton, as well as my poor mother's weakness; and you, are you actually secure enough to be willing to dare public censure? Are you willing to let this whole matter come up in the courts on a chance of making another profit on that land? Colonel Fanton, I can see where the first temptation for all this came in. You were poor when you went into that lumber speculation after the war. But now, if you take unfair advantage of this foreigner, what name will you give your act?"

"Don, don't talk like that," groaned the older man. "I've had a pretty hard night of it already, my boy. You know I've always been your friend, Don. I reckon I've been hasty on this Baumann matter. I tell you for a fact, I was chiefly vexed because you insisted on getting into my way. And I don't see yet why you give a hang about the German, Don. He never was a friend of yours."

"I am not in the least interested in Baumann," returned Peyton-Call; "I'm not in this business for personal reasons at all. It's because I've decided to suppress you, Colonel Fanton, in the interest of the community, that I mean to fight this matter through. Whatever it costs I'll face. I'll save my poor mother's reputation as far as I can honorably save it; and when it comes to that, the men of the community know better than to speak ill of her while I am alive.

The dead are forgiven at last; but your case is different, sir. You are still active in overreaching your neighbors, and you are going to be exposed."

"No need, no need, Don, I'll withdraw," cried Colonel Fanton, brokenly. "You must bear with me, Son; Virgie's leaving me like this has mighty nigh upset me and I've been a little hasty. But I'll withdraw my suit against Baumann. I'll send word to Carson to-night."

"Thank you, sir," said Peyton-Call, quietly. Then he stepped impulsively forward and offered the other his hand. With a pitiful eagerness the older man took it and wrung it.

"You're a good boy, Don! A generous boy," he said, and choked a little. "You're like your father, Don!"

I fled from the room to find a retreat where I could give way to tears. The piazza was deserted of guests, the music was still. From the dining-room came the gay talk and laughter of those to whom Miss Lucy Call was serving refreshments. As I passed the window I heard someone exclaim that she hadn't laid eyes on Virgie this ever so long.

I stepped down into the moonlit garden walk and paced up and down and calmed myself. Then I saw Peyton-Call coming out of the office and turning down toward the steps. Not a

look he cast along the piazza to see where I had gone.

I felt I had hardly breath enough to call his name, but I made him hear, and he came back toward me with his cruel air of formal politeness. What could he do for Miss Dale?

"I want to thank you for helping my friends," I said, with no great assurance, "I'm sorry it has cost you pain."

"A lady's thanks are always worth earning," he returned, with heartless gallantry, "but this case is peculiar. I was asked to serve without reward, and I can't accept your thanks."

I knew him now, his whole pride and his stubborn, breaking heart. I could plainly feel how he was defying me. And to this mood of his I had to dare my confession.

"There's something besides my thanks; I have an explanation to offer," I said, humbly.

"I am unhappily clear on everything that concerns me," he returned. "I want nothing explained."

"Then you know why I took you for a fortune-hunter?" I demanded, desperately.

At that he lost his nerve and flared up.

"Did you?" he cried, fiercely.

"Yes, I did. When you investigated my claims in New York to satisfy yourself I was not your dangerous capitalist, my friends there were warning me against the wily adventurer——"

"And you believed them?" he asked, threateningly.

"Yes, I did, Donald, and it nearly broke my heart."

"Served you right!" he cried, bitterly, as he seized both my hands.

On the lower terrace, close over the brawling, moonlit river we walked up and down, and slowly, haltingly I endeavored to set right the wrong I had committed. Donald kept his hand on mine, his eyes on my face, but would not help me by a single word. In that rushing quiet of breeze and waters not a sound reached us from the house. I had a solemn sense of remoteness from the world. For good or ill we two were isolated from all others, dependent upon each other for every ray of happiness till death should part us; and here we were in the first hour after love's confession, he hurt and embittered, I uncertain and afraid.

The warm scent of the boxwood came over me in waves, and up the river, in the gap, the moonlight fell on the clay bluffs, the gold-red soil of my native Rolfe. Above them stood the dark pines, and over them the northern star hung low and pale in the lighted sky. Yes, I was at home in my beloved South! The hope of my childhood was fulfilled. Was it not a gauge of future happiness?

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